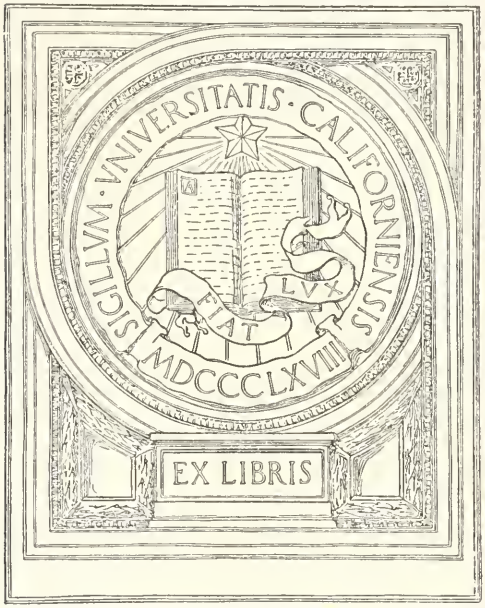

PAN AND THE TWINS

# PAN AND THE TWINS

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# CONTENTS

# I

## *IN THE CAMPAGNA*

DARK athwart the purple twilight of the Campagna there stretched an aqueduct bearing sweet water to Rome. The flight of its arches eclipsed newly risen stars and sprang aloft from among reeds and thickets, where danced the fire-fly and croaked the frog.

At the foot of a stone pier, huddled together, bruised and suffering from many blows and many wrongs, there sat a ragged lad. His face had been beautiful save for the grief upon it; but it was stained with tears and distorted with pain. The boy was dark-eyed, with a delicacy of feature and a brooding thoughtfulness of expression akin to the sculptors' Antinous. Now, however, tribulation concealed his good looks, and he wept again at the hopelessness of his position.

The stars ascended from their eclipse behind the aqueduct and the young moon set; but it was scarcely dark, for another day already loitered behind the mountains.

Then came a precious shape out of the gloom, and Pan, plodding through the night-hidden Campagna, stood above this miserable lad.

It was, indeed, Pan himself—the Pasturer, son of Zeus and Callisto. He came, a stalwart shape with shaggy breast and arms, puck-nose, bright horns and genial countenance—man and animal one—with the all-seeing eyes of divinity. His syrinx hung over his shoulder and about his head there streamed a halo of adoring fire-flies, that moved as he moved.

"And what is the matter with you, human boy?" asked the god mildly.

The youngster instantly recognising that august presence, was too alarmed immediately to answer. He fell upon his knees and Pan patted his thick, black hair.

"Why, Arcadius, do you weep in this unmanly fashion?" he inquired.

"Very dreadful things have happened, Mighty One," answered the youth, "and I cannot forbear to shed tears, for all happiness and hope have departed out of my life."

"At fifteen years of age there is still hope," replied Pan. "Relate your tale, and I shall see if you tell it truly."

He sat down, crossed his hairy thighs and waited for the boy to speak.

"I was slave to Caius Crassus and worked in his vineyards until to-day," began Arcadius. "But this morning, as ill-luck willed, I fell into prayer and had set this—your image—upon a stone, and was worshipping before it when my master entered the vineyard and surprised me."

From his wallet he produced a little figure of Pan coarsely carved on a piece of walnut wood.

The god examined it.

"Not an inspiration," he said, "yet doubtless the artist meant well."

"I will destroy it now that I have seen you

with my own eyes, Mighty One," answered Arcadius; but his deity prevented him.

"Keep it," he replied; "the puppet will serve to remind you of a day worth remembering."

"I shan't forget this hour in a hurry," answered the lad. "My grief may be forgotten, not my God."

"Proceed with your story then."

"Caius Crassus is a Christian and uneven tempered; but he seldom beats us. Unfortunately, however, while I lifted my prayer, sundry accursed goats, who know you not, strayed in the vines and did much evil. Observing this, my master terribly chastised me—my back is bruised and I am still aching all over. Nor is that the worst, for Caius Crassus cast me out and willed that he should never see my face again. Thus life is ended, and I hope that I may presently die and be no more."

"To pray is good," answered Pan, "and to pray to me was not amiss; but to pray to me, when you ought to be working for somebody

else, only proves that you have not yet grasped the nature of things. Your prayer to me was uttered at the expense of your duty to Caius Crassus; and such devotion is of doubtful lustre. I heard, however, and I was aware of the sequel. But henceforth do not address yourself to me, when you should be about other business."

"I have no 'henceforth,' Great God," answered Arcadius. "I do not want to go on living. Life without happiness—there is no charm in that."

"Like all young things, and middle-aged things, and even old things, you are greedy of happiness," answered Pan, "and I am the last to blame you; but happiness is a difficult subject, Arcadius, concerning which I will expound the truth on another occasion. For the moment you need healing and consolation. To the broken boy a sound skin is happiness, therefore, so far, be happy; to the hungry boy a full skin is happiness, therefore, so far, feel joy."

The god lifted his great hand, stroked the

bruises of Arcadius and healed them; while delight mantled the lad's face at feeling himself whole; and then Pan touched the earth, whereupon appeared a cake of wheaten bread, a wedge of honeycomb, four great red plums and a handful of chestnuts.

He watched Arcadius eat and smiled, even as a kindly mortal will smile to see youth feeding with good appetite; but his countenance appeared to be melancholy and his divine thoughts tinged with gloom. This the boy perceived, for he was an observant lad.

"Sorrow is upon your face, Mighty One," he ventured to say; "but I will never make you sorry again. I will be good and worship at the proper time in future, and work hard if I can find a master."

"Sorrow is upon my face, as you declare," answered Pan, "for a sufficient reason. To-day though Rome knows it not as yet, there has fallen the Emperor. He expired far off beyond the Tigris after defeating the armies of King Sapor."

"Julian!" cried the lad.

"A Persian spear has ended that remarkable life and turned the hour of triumph into mourning," answered Pan. "He who supported our altars against the Time Spirit has vanished and an evil day is dawning for the gods, a worse for the goddesses. With Julian's passing, our temples must presently be shut and deserted; the Christians will pardon, or seek revenge, according to their natures. Therefore I am sad while, with proleptic eyes, I gaze into the future."

"The Emperor Julian fallen!"

"Nobly he fell, with his face to the foe, and never man spoke worthier words before his spirit fled," replied Pan. "About him assembled Oribazius, his physician, and the sages, Priscus and Maximus, of Ephesus, without whom he travelled not. There came also Hormizdas Lucilian, Sallustius, Jovian and a young centurion of the imperial horse, Ammianus Marcellinus, who in time to come will win fame as an historian of these events. Thus, then, did the dying Cæsar address them, while with lowered heads and falling tears they

mourned his fate. 'I have learned from philosophy,' said Julian, 'how much more excellent is the soul than the body, and that the separation of the nobler substance should be the subject of joy rather than of affliction. . . . I die without remorse, as I have lived without guilt. . . . I have considered the happiness of my people as the end of government.' Observe, Arcadius, that Julian, too, thought upon happiness—for others. Though he had been forewarned that by the sword he must die, the Emperor hesitated not to lead his armies against the national foe. And what does he say at the last? 'I now offer my tribute of gratitude to the Eternal Being, who has not suffered me to perish by the cruelty of a tyrant, by the dagger of secret enemies, or the tortures of disease.' Nor did Julian name another to follow him in the purple. With virile wisdom he left that great task to the living and allowed no dead hand to weight their councils. 'As a good citizen,' said he, 'I shall only express my hopes that the Romans may be blessed with the government of a virtuous

sovereign.' So Julian departed off the earth and was united with the stars and Apollo, the Lord of Light."

Pan ceased for a time, and Arcadius considered these great matters. Then his god turned to the lad's affairs.

"I shall now," he said, "relate your history, which it becomes essential you should know."

"I only remember that I had a little twin brother," replied Arcadius, "and we were separated when still very small."

"The facts are these," explained his deity. "Your father, Marcus Pomponius, a good and kindly man, loved your mother, Aurelia; but she being a daughter of the people and he a patrician, it was not convenient that he should wed her. Aurelia died when you and your twin brother came into the world, and your maternal grandmother, who hated Marcus, looked to it that his children should see Pomponius no more. He much desired to make the world a pleasant place for both of you; but he was prevented from doing so, and though he endeavoured to find you after

his great grief at your mother's death, good care was taken that he should not. He therefore erected a handsome stele to the beautiful Aurelia, who was buried in his own grounds and not among the folk, mourned her with bitter tears, prayed the gods to bless her in Hades, and presently married Placidia, the daughter of Scribonius Spartianus. With Placidia and his mother, the matron Latona, your father now dwells at his famous villa on a spur of the Sabine Mountains nigh Tivoli. And thither you must seek him. Proclaim to him that you are his son, and let him know that Pan has sent you. Should he doubt, permit him to see my gift ; then he will doubt no more."

" Your gift is eaten, Great God," answered Arcadius, licking his lips.

" My gift has yet to be given," replied Pan. " Briefly, you shall be privileged to understand the speech of all things of the pad and hoof and wing. This will be useful knowledge in the days to come, and such an accomplishment must convince your parent, if indeed your remarkable

likeness to your mother fails to do so. But fear not: he will receive you with genuine delight. He has no family, and his wife is a Christian. Himself he worships the Great Mother, Rhea-Cybele, and entertains an affection for me also. Indeed a considerable part of his domain is at my service, and I often wander there and bless his flocks and herds. For the present, farewell. The gods, Arcadius, care not for crowds. Their highest entertainment is found in watching a single body and mind working alone. Thus I shall follow you, and I trust you to remember it and give me nothing but pleasure. Meet me here in six months' time, when Jovian reigns and Julian lies in his last, long sleep beside the crystal founts of Cydnus. The philosophers will demand that his body should rest in the groves of the Academy; his soldiers will clamour to join his warrior ashes with those of Cæsar in the Field of Mars. Seldom has the dust of a king awakened such competition."

Arcadius ventured to speak before the god departed.

"Do you know my brother, Mighty One?" he asked.

"I do," answered Pan, "and it is seemly that you should think upon him. He is become a Christian from force of circumstances, and promises to be a very good one. When you were sold for a handful of silver denarii to Caius Crassus, your twin brother was received into the household of Cassius P. Lucanus. But he liked it not and ran away."

"Shall I ever see him again?" inquired Arcadius, and Pan promised that he might expect to do so.

"In years to come you will meet," he answered. "And now go upon your way. Enter Rome to-morrow, and in the market-place you shall see a man with a cart and black horse. Beg for a lift to Tivoli, and his heart will be touched to grant it. From his destination anybody will direct you to the Pomponian lands."

Grateful Arcadius knelt down, kissed the hoof of the god and went his way; but he had not proceeded a hundred paces when he

heard Pan's syrinx, for the guardian of living things had lifted the reed to his lips and now wailed a melancholy dirge to the Shade of departed Julian.

And at that sacred sound, the creatures of the night pricked ear and set forth on speedy paws, that they might salute the god. Many hastened past Arcadius, who would have questioned them, to learn if indeed he had received the divine gift of animal understanding; but lynx and pard, fox and brock, rats and mice, great buffaloes, does and little fawns all hastened so swiftly that he might not address them.

Then came a huge tortoise—Pan's own beast, dedicate of old time to the god—and though he lumbered along at his best pace, it was not difficult for Arcadius to move beside him.

"Tell me, good friend," said he, "are you a happy tortoise?"

And the reptile understood, but since his intellect was too small to feel surprise at being questioned by a human boy, replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

" I am two hundred years old," he said, and appeared to think no farther answer was needed.

Arcadius walked three miles and then, beyond the range of Pan's melancholy piping, the animals were about their own affairs and in no hurry, for never a wild beast hastens unless there is need to do so.

The boy stopped a vixen fox and put his former problem.

" Are you a happy fox ? " he inquired ; and the creature understood and was rather pleased to be questioned.

" I might easily be," she answered, " though as a fact I am not. We foxes are a sequestered people without any sense of large friendship and communion. We mate and live alone. We seldom see our neighbours, and make no offer of amity when we do. No other fox visits my den ; no mother compares her cubs with mine, or exchanges the news, or even passes the time of day. We keep ourselves to ourselves, and when our young are grown, they go out into the world and we see them no more. The life

of a fox, therefore, is lonely, for a husband is not society — and children cannot take the place of neighbours, gossip, company. Therefore being by birth a fox, though at heart unfoxlike, gregarious, intensely sociable, convivial and hospitable, I am disappointed, because no opportunity arises or can arise for the display of my gifts. The unusual are, as a rule, unhappy. You may have noticed that."

"You ought to have been another person," said Arcadius.

"Exactly," answered the vixen.

"It seems a common state of things," continued the boy.

"That makes it no better," replied she. "To kill the fatted calf for friends! To gather a whole party of foxes and entertain them and be entertained! How admirable an experience! But it is denied me, because normal, vulpine nature hates parties and, in any case, I know not a soul to ask."

"I might visit you some day and tell you the news," said Arcadius, and she thanked him, but not warmly.

" It wouldn't be quite the same thing," she explained.

" I suppose not," he answered. Then he bade her good night and walked toward the walls of the city.

Here, protected from wild beasts by shepherds standing silent like sentinels round about, there ranged the flocks and herds of Rome; and presently Arcadius found himself among slumbering sheep, that breathed heavily in the darkness and minded not the summer dew upon their fleeces. One moved to turn over and her the lad accosted.

" Are you a happy sheep? " he asked, and the sheep, who was sleeping badly, but possessed patience and even intelligence, explained that she was not.

" I might be," she said, " but temperament makes my lot not such as I would most desire. I should have loved a lonely life of retirement and contemplation. I look up to yonder hills and envy the creatures who can go all day and night without seeing a fellow-being. Silence, peace, solitude: these are my dream. But

they can never be mine, because I belong to a people not happy out of sight of each other, and only strong in the strength of a multitude. I am one of a timid folk who love to hear each other's voices, shake beyond sound of the bell-wether and feel that in union is their sole security. I cannot roam away and live the life I would live; because, if I attempted to do so, strange and savage enemies would interfere with my contemplation, slay me and rend me for their food. Such, my child, is life. We must, in fact, wear our coat according to our wool, and accept the conditions that alone sustain our well-being, even if we dream of others better suited to our ideals."

"You would not care to come for a long and lonely walk sometimes—with me to protect you?" suggested Arcadius, and the sheep regarded him humorously.

"A shepherd I know, and a shepherd's dog I know; but who are you?" she asked.

Then she satisfied herself that a hundred neighbours were within call, turned over and wooed slumber again.

Arcadius also felt a need of sleep. His eyelids were closing over his wonderful brown eyes, and Somnus led him to a mossy stone, where he might repose until morning. For the city gates were fast shut and they would not open till the dawn.

With a prayer of thanksgiving to Pan, he curled upon his couch, heaved a great sigh of contentment, thought upon the death of the Emperor and slept until heaven had grown white again above the Alban Hills.

## II

## *THE FATHER OF ARCADIUS*

THE magnificent villa of Marcus Pomponius stood on a southern slope of the Sabines in the midst of a great estate. Vanished members of this patrician family had added to and adorned the mansion for several generations, and it was now become one of the most famous in the neighbourhood of Rome. The gardens were noted for their superb fountains, but many a mile of the domain still lay in the lap of nature, and it was a tradition in the Pomponian race that this must so remain, at the wish of Cybele expressed to the founder of the clan in the Augustan age.

Marcus Pomponius was a mild and intelligent Roman of no distinction whatever. He inclined to art and literature—was indeed himself said to be writing a book, which he found a very present help in time of trouble; and,

for the rest, lived as quietly as circumstance allowed and mingled but little in the social festivities or civic life of the capital. He gave a dozen banquets of state during the year, and had once entertained Julian himself.

After the sad affair with the mother of the twins, he married, that the Pomponian name might be carried forward; but children did not bless the alliance, and as a result Placidia, his wife, fell back whole-heartedly upon religion. She was a Christian, and in those days a cool logic, won from Greece, made it possible for husband and wife to worship different deities without grief or pain to either. Thus Marcus spent much time in the noble temple to Rhea-Cybele that adorned his chestnut wood, while Placidia prayed elsewhere with the early Christians and drove once a month to Rome, that she might worship with her co-religionists at this or that basilica. Latona, the mother of Marcus, shared his opinions and prayed to his goddess.

Mother and wife adored the undistinguished man; both loved every hair on his head; and

both, out of their deep but unimaginative affection, had already turned every hair grey. Between them Marcus found life to be difficult, and he was often needlessly let and hindered. When friends desired him to travel and set forth on adventures, he would say that he had enough of adventure at home. Both ladies knew that he was delicate and needed care; but they differed radically as to treatment. His mother coddled him in her old-fashioned way; his wife was always urging him to take more fresh air, more exercise and less stimulant. He liked them both, and admired their high Roman qualities, their dignity and their sense of what became them and himself; but he had long ceased to love either of them, save academically. They did not understand him, or the slight beauty of mind that belonged to him. Instead, his mother urged him to set a higher standard of form and ceremony and take himself and his exalted position more seriously; while his wife was ambitious and constantly urged him to abandon his secluded habits and seek place and power, as

befitted his high rank, great riches and famous ancestry. He fell back on his health, which in reality began to be far more precarious than anybody imagined. His temperament was lymphatic and his vitality low; whereas his mother enjoyed a fulness of life much greater than her age of five-and-sixty years, and his spouse, Placidia, had been wrongly named, for a more energetic, bustling, tireless woman never lived. She was thin and wiry; her beauty faded quicklier than she imagined, and her rather stern, amber-coloured eyes seemed too large for her face. She wore her wonderful fair hair in a fillet, above which it towered to a top-knot. It was of a hard brilliance, and looked more like metal than hair. Her voice was also metallic. She suggested a brilliant but songless bird.

Latona presented an extreme contrast to her daughter-in-law. Her proportions were most generous, her gestures sculpturesque, her movements slow and dignified. She dyed her hair, and time had not abated the deep and gong-like throb of her majestic voice. She spoke

slowly, as a big bell rings slowly. Her carriage was exceedingly august, and she lacked humour or any interest in anything small.

Marcus Pomponius was too thin and always felt chilly in consequence. He suffered from indigestion and often endured a twinge of gout, which made him testy for the time ; but when it was past, he begged everybody, down to the least slave, for forgiveness. He would chat familiarly with the domestics, which caused his mother discomfort, and she regarded with increasing uneasiness a democratic taint that appeared in the mind of Marcus as he grew older.

Now he walked his magnificent atrium among bronze and marble statues of great ancestors, and wondered whether a sense of tightness about the midriff was an incipient cold, or merely the result of too much tunny with his morning repast.

" I have observed before that tunny goes ill with white wine, and I ought to have remembered it," he said to himself. " Now I shall not enjoy my prandium."[1]

[1] Prandium, luncheon.

Then came old Brutus, his factotum, and saluted the master.

"There is a ragged herd-boy at the outer gate, who begs for speech with you, Marcus Pomponius," said the ancient man.

"A herd-boy—speech with me—how strange!" answered Marcus mildly.

"He appears to be well favoured and civil spoken; he declares that you would not willingly turn him away."

"Life is full of puzzles, Brutus. Here am I reflecting on deep matters and the fate of our Emperor in the Assyrian plains, and you fall bluntly, brutally upon my reverie with the fantastic news that a herd-boy would have audience."

"I'll send him packing, Marcus Pomponius."

"Nay, bid him enter. I will see him. Important things often have their beginnings in this unpretentious way. Doubtless he is the messenger of a greater than himself."

"Shall I bid him to the bath before he approaches?"

"No, let him come as he is; and talking of

baths, I fear I dallied in mine too long, Brutus. My heart is tired this morning."

"You will take it too hot, Marcus Pomponius."

The retainer withdrew and in two minutes Arcadius stood before his father.

He had slept at a stony cave in the woods after his journey from Rome and washed his face and hair in a rivulet before approaching the mansion. He was looking exceedingly beautiful and radiant, but ragged.

"What would you with me, boy?" asked Marcus kindly. Then his eyes fell on the countenance of Arcadius and he gave a gentle start.

"You remind me of somebody," he said. "I have an amazing memory for faces, though often fail to put a name to them. Be silent and let me reflect."

The lad stood still awhile; then Marcus scanned his features and shook his head.

"I cannot bring you to my mind," he declared. Whereupon Arcadius told his tale and the other remembered.

"By Jupiter! This is no lie—you are like her—it was she—my tender treasure—my Aurelia. There can be no doubt whatever that you are her son!"

Marcus was much moved.

He sat down at the base of the statue of Titus Atticus Pomponius, his great-grandfather, who had done important things in Africa, and shed a few tears.

"God Pan sent me," said his child.

"Praise be to him then. This is undoubtedly the most important thing which has happened in my family for many years. This day of July is sacred for evermore. But you had a brother? What of him?"

"He is a Christian, and Pan says that we shall some day meet again," answered the lad.

"Henceforth, Arcadius, regard this as your home," began the elder. "I am determined on it. Nothing shall shake me. One must have one's own way sometimes. I seldom insist; but this is a case when my will must become law. Let me look into your eyes.

Dear gods! Your mother lives again in them. Have you eaten any breakfast?"

"No, Master."

"You have my permission to address me as 'Father,'" said Marcus Pomponius, and the word moved him again. Then he lifted his voice and summoned Brutus.

"Take this lad and feed him of the best," he said, "then despatch Porphyrio for the tailor, and see that the sleeping apartment next my own is prepared. Brutus, old friend, this is my own boy, the child of—you understand."

Nothing ever surprised Brutus; but Placidia was more easily astonished, and when presently she hastened through the atrium on her way to the store-house and heard this amazing news, she showed an inclination to disbelieve it.

"Moonshine," said Placidia, "some rustic plot against us."

"It is true, great lady," answered the boy, "and to show you that I tell truth, God Pan has divulged to me a sad secret not yet known in Rome."

"Pan! You are a pagan, then?"

"He was in the Campagna the night before last; he healed my bruises and sent me to my father."

Placidia showed impatience.

"What next?" she asked her husband.

"There can be no doubt," he answered firmly. "His mother—you recollect—I have an unfaltering memory for faces."

Placidia cast a look of something akin to annoyance at the handsome lad.

"Julian is dead," declared Arcadius. "The Emperor has fallen beyond the Tigris. Pan knew it and told me."

"If that, indeed, be true, I can forgive a great deal," answered Placidia. "If that be true, let the idolaters look to themselves!"

She lifted a triumphant glance upward and went her way, while the eyes and thoughts of Marcus were cast down.

"Sorry news for Cybele," he murmured.

"It is true, most noble father."

"I believe you, my son. Did Pan name the Emperor to be?"

"He did not."

. . . . .

Latona, when introduced to her grandchild, regarded him with mingled feelings. He was concealed from her until clad in rich garments, anointed with perfumes and polished up generally. She could not fail to admire his extraordinary beauty, and she perceived a likeness to her own husband, the grandfather of Arcadius, which was hidden from the eyes of her son. Decorum and propriety suggested indifference; but everything that was precious to Marcus interested his mother, even though she might not understand it, and at sight of his joy and excitement over this remarkable adventure, Latona had not the heart to say much.

"He must be apprenticed to one of the guilds," she suggested. But then Marcus struck, with all the obstinacy of a gentle nature, and both his parent and his wife perceived that, for once, without any question whatever, he was going to be master in his own house.

From the first he developed the quintessence of fatherly devotion. A nature naturally affectionate, which of late years had found little on which to lavish its rich emotional, not to say sentimental, quality, promptly bubbled over for Arcadius. Masters were engaged to instruct him in elocution, rhetoric, deportment and all the arts and sciences. He was received into the family as a member thereof; and it said a great deal for the lad's native charm, good sense and good nature that a position which promised to be exceedingly complicated brought no real discomfort for anybody concerned.

Placidia perceived that Arcadius was a youth of agreeable presence and high principle; Latona observed that the boy did his father much practical good—took Marcus out of himself, gave him something to think about, added to his joy of life and made him far less self-centred and solitary. Placidia, much heartened in secret by learning the new Emperor, Jovian, was a Christian, endured the addition to the family circle, and privately

designed to win Arcadius to the true faith; Latona, discovering that the boy spoke with Pan and was, indeed, to keep an appointment with the god in six months, regarded him as an object of some reverence. With her son she shared the utmost uneasiness as to the future of religion; and the fact that Pan had expressed gloomy forebodings on the same subject, as Arcadius related, much troubled both Marcus and the Roman matron.

Patrician tact and courtesy should have prompted Placidia to conceal her own religious gratification. But she openly hoped the Emperor might take a high hand in this matter, and she was disappointed when the worldly wisdom of Jovian prompted him to a moderate course. Affairs were doubtful and dangerous when Julian passed, and the new Emperor found his hands too full to raise for himself any needless difficulty.

To Antioch came the opposing champions of the new faith in myriads; but they found a war-weary ruler who, declining to take either side, urged concord and charity on all.

Himself he professed and declared devotion to the Nicene creed, and bid Athanasius reappear from the fastnesses whither he had withdrawn for safety under Julian's brief rule.

The saint assured his monarch that a long and peaceful reign would reward such piety; but alas! within a year the jovial Jovian ate a doubtful mushroom and slept with his fathers.

What says Neander upon the situation that he had created? He quotes with the approval of all just persons the golden words of that moderate Pagan, Themistius, and we venture to set them here before leaving so serious a subject. Thus he spoke to his sovereign; and the echo of his wisdom reverberated a little while before it was silenced.

"The laws of emperors run scarcely longer than their lives," declared Themistius, "but the law of God remains for ever unchangeable —that every man shall be free in reference to his own mode of worship. This law, no pillage of goods, no death on the cross, or at the stake, can extinguish. You may kill the body,

but though the tongue shall be silenced, the soul rises to carry with it its own unconquerable will."

Such sentiments and such freedom, forgotten for near two thousand years, are beginning again to be remembered.

. . . . .

Arcadius kept punctual appointment with his god, and Pan smiled upon him and observed that he had grown. He promised indeed to make a splendid man; but there was already in his expression that cast of thought too apt to develop, where there is a brain, and ruin the human animal prematurely.

"Are you as happy as when I healed your stripes, my son?" asked the deity, and Arcadius answered in words that already revealed a metaphysical nature.

"Happiness is never quite pure, Mighty Father," he answered. "When you healed me, the happiness of being healed was most perfect and complete; but it wore off."

"Custom is fatal to happiness," said Pan.

" You can never be happy twice in exactly the same manner."

" Happiness perhaps exhausts itself," suggested Arcadius. " Then it is pain. I should be happy—I am happy now—happy in learning—happy in bathing, in eating, in wandering through my father's woods. Above all, I am happy in my father himself ; and yet from my dear father himself comes unhappiness."

" Happiness is a butterfly that never settles," answered Pan. " You have won great joy for your father, and yet, out of him and by virtue of your sonship with him, has come a new unhappiness."

" I am unhappy because he is unhappy," explained Arcadius. " He does not say so, yet I am quick to see that from the great love they feel for him, his wife and my grandmother cause him to be a good deal distracted. They love him very much indeed, but they love him differently, and each thinks that the other loves him in a mistaken manner. Thus they argue over him and often make a good deal of noise. Then each comes to seek his support against the other.

But he is a man of peace, and finds himself very often called to rush away to Rhea-Cybele in his garden and kneel to the goddess, having first locked the door of her temple. All this is sad."

"I know," answered the god. "Thus, out of your great and glorious translation has come suffering, which as a fatherless slave you had escaped. This is the very principle and heart of all happiness: it is a bud which ever carries within its scented petals a little worm. All happiness, save one happiness, is constituted thus."

"Indeed no, dear God!" cried Arcadius. "I can think of many happinesses that would breed no worm to tatter them. When I am wise I shall learn how to reach perfect happiness. But even in learning what is happiness, there is sorrow too."

"How so?" inquired Pan.

"When I was all fool," answered his little one, "then I escaped the sad knowledge of my folly; now that I am beginning to be taught wisdom, I shed tears to think what a fool I am.

It is a strange and sad fact about learning that the more I glean, the vaster remains the store yet to be gleaned."

"Even so," admitted Pan. "Learning is a hoard from which the greater your filchings the mightier appears to be the mass. But let this not make you unhappy. You have some talent and a cheerful disposition. Learning, rightly digested, will make of you an optimist; if it curdle in the stomach, as so often happens, then you will be a pessimist and a sterile thing. Therefore do not sigh, as the avenues and defiles of your ignorance yawn wider and wider before you, but go forward in patience, remembering that to know yourself for a fool is the first step to wisdom. Lighten your father's heart, do his will and please the ladies with your singing and good cheer. To be young is a great accomplishment in itself, and the boy who can help his elders to feel young again is doing well and justifying his existence. Most boys only succeed in making their elders feel still more old. Avoid this. And remember that for you are open channels into wisdom

denied your fellow-boys. That was my gift: that you should gather from the bird and beast a measure of understanding they have won in a harder school than yours and from stricter taskmasters than rap your knuckles with their rulers."

"I do talk to the things," said Arcadius. "But they are so simple. I asked a nightingale why it sang yesternight, and all it answered was, 'Because I'm a nightingale.'"

"The deepest knowledge is the simplest," declared Pan. "Know you how some men learned the use of the wheel and so promoted their powers of locomotion a thousandfold? In the beginning of days a savage with genius perceived the wind blowing an empty shell over the sand, and he observed that the shell sped faster than all other things driven by the gale. By a miracle of intuition he perceived that this gift lay not in the shell but its quality of roundness. Hence a discovery as great as any recorded. Another savage in another land perceived that the sun and moon made wondrous haste through heaven, and judged that

in their rotundity lay the secret of their speed. He fashioned a moon of wood therefore and marked how it flew over the green grass. Then, fitting two moons to his sledge, he astounded his kinsfolk and immediately became a god. Many gods have done far less for man than that."

Thus Pan beguiled a twilight hour, and then Arcadius knelt and kissed his hoof, promised to visit him again when he should receive a direction to do so, and went home.

## III

## *OF EMPEROR VALENTINIAN*

ARCADIUS found that his father constantly stole away from the sharp edge of family discussions to the book that he was writing; and this in time became a sort of watchword or warning between the boy and his parent. Thus Arcadius would sometimes leave Placidia and Latona in the heat of fierce altercations for love of Marcus, intercept his parent and whisper, "I should do a bit of my book this morning, father." Whereupon Marcus would vanish and escape the argument; while at other times Marcus himself, struggling with difficulty from the fires of feminine affection, might meet Arcadius and say, with all due solemnity, "I shall be about my book till vesperna,[1] my son."

The boy made good progress at his own

[1] Vesperna, the evening meal.

studies and proved a promising student. He desired before all things to read, that he might understand the poets of whom Marcus so often spoke. He was industrious, yet spent a measure of his time on the hillside and learned much from the birds and beasts. Nor did the reptiles deny him. The lizards were a simple people, and their ideals seemed ill-adapted to a human boy in the fortunate position of Arcadius; but the serpent stored wisdom for her friends as well as poison for her enemies.

When Arcadius met this creature, she had just relieved herself of her old skin and shone very beautifully in olive, gold and russet-brown. She was not without her vanity; therefore she crept to the mirror of a still pool, that she might view the bands and diamonds of her new gown. And on the thorn tree, like a wisp of spun glass, her cast-off garment hung.

The boy congratulated the snake on her appearance, and in her didactic fashion she pointed a moral for him.

"Always remember," she said, "that even

thorns are useful things. You perceive how they assisted me to wriggle from my outworn robe; and prickles, such as philosophers provide, serve well to help the discarding of those worthless garments in which we are too wont to dress our minds. I refer to prejudice, error, stupid opinions and such-like. But the stern philosophers use their thorns without thought of their bitter sharpness; only the artist hides his dagger in beauty, as do the fragrant furzes. His thorns you must forgive."

"I am learning to read as fast as I can," declared Arcadius.

The serpent trickled away, to show herself to one who loved her, and the boy rambling on met a carrion crow, who was walking up and down in evident excitement. He nodded his head to himself and appeared well satisfied with life.

"You look pleased, carrion crow," said Arcadius.

"I am," said the carrion crow. "I have every reason to be."

"Then I am pleased also," answered the boy. "What's the luck?"

But the dark bird showed suspicion.

"It's my luck, not yours," he answered. "I've found a deer that will be dead to-morrow; but I'm not going to tell you where he is."

"I don't want to know—unless I can make him well," answered Arcadius.

"There's no question of recovery," replied the carrion crow. "And you needn't ask for particulars, because I'm going to peck out his eyes when he's gone, not you. Finding is keeping in a case of this sort."

"Poor deer," answered Arcadius, and he felt dislike against the soot-coloured speaker because his habits were rude. And yet he learned something, for when men and women in days to come were sly and hid from him silly little secrets, which he had no desire to learn, he remembered the carrion bird.

Arcadius proved a very great joy to his father. Indeed Marcus Pomponius, from a sort of twilight life which he cared not how soon

would darken into night, found life to be worth living again and was never half so happy as in the company of his son.

The boy reflected Marcus in his love for beauty and peace, and he resembled his dead mother also in the charm of his presence and avidity for joy.

Together they would sometimes creep away and place rare blossoms on the stele of Aurelia. Marcus was composing a verse for the memorial, and had indeed been polishing his thought for years ; but the advent of Arcadius caused him to begin all over again.

He sent messages for Pan, on the occasion of his son's next visit to the god, and also conveyed a gift from the Pomponian kitchen, arranged in secret with Brutus. Pan accepted the present and promised at a future date to visit Marcus in his own grounds, at a spot where oleanders made the thicket pink above a stream.

Of the ladies, in process of time their first regard for Arcadius abated ; and this from no fault of his own. Latona, though ponderous

and patrician to a degree, was of quick mind, and she perceived that the boy had done for her own son much that she had desired to do and failed. Marcus found his prime pleasure with the youth; Arcadius was ever upon his lips and in his mind; for the lad he would do a thousand things that Latona had failed to make him. In a word, she began to feel there was a little too much Arcadius about the villa. And yet to quarrel with him would have been both unreasonable and beneath her dignity. But her maternal love was wounded and, according to custom, she took it out of Marcus Pomponius himself.

"I perceive this child is coming between us," she said. "I sadly miss your old devotion, Marcus."

She sighed massively.

"I change not," she continued; "but it is hard to feel that my place can be taken by this bright young thing—untried, unknown. I hope you will never live to regret it, or feel, as you make me feel, that the failure of a child's love is the keenest agony a parent can know."

He winced at this little stab and assured her that she was mistaken. He was, in truth, an extraordinarily good and faithful son, and he racked his brains after Latona's third remonstrance and redoubled his filial attention. But it was tiring, and her reproachful eyes tortured his sensitive spirit; her sighs hurt him quite as much as she desired they should.

Placidia adopted a different line. The situation, naturally enough, was peculiarly painful for her; but she did not mourn, or weep about it. She took it cynically and lost no opportunity to remind Marcus that the debonair youth was an achievement on the wrong side of the blanket and, as such, not to be much regarded. Her husband disliked this attitude intensely. He would have preferred that Placidia should have viewed the situation from his own angle; and in process of time she was constrained to do so; because upon this subject, while pliant as usual on every other, the master of the house abated no shadow of his determination.

The Roman law kept within the dictates of

humanity even as early as A.D. 364, though to this day there is a barbaric island wherein such little ones are still "the sons of none"—a fiction that the State, the Law, the Church continue to support while civilisation shudders.

It became exceedingly clear that Arcadius was destined to succeed his father and carry on the Pomponian line—a situation that the mother of Marcus received with mingled emotions, while Placidia hid hers, after trying without success to turn her husband from his purpose.

Marcus Pomponius went to court, to pay homage to Valentinian, the new Emperor of the West. He was a majestic monarch—a warrior, whose incomparable feats in Africa and Britain had won him the love of the soldiery and a very handsome fortune. Bold and wise and worldly wise proved Valentinian. He had no Greek, never finding time to learn that language; neither did he waste his wind in rhetoric; but he always knew exactly what he wanted to say and seldom failed to make

his meaning nakedly apparent. He distrusted the pagan gods, but being too good a soldier to criticise on grounds of faith, Julian had employed and honoured him. Merit raised Valentinian to the absolute government of the Roman empire at five-and-forty years of age; he set his brother, Valens, in the throne of the East and then applied himself to his own task with the immense energy, concentration and foresight that had made him a great man.

Marcus, in his white toga, with Arcadius for page, greeted royalty amid the patricians and received a gracious welcome. He was naturally interested in the religious question and agreeably surprised to learn that, despite his own views, Valentinian did not propose to tyrannise in this matter. Against magic and witchcraft, however, he set his face very strongly. He believed in the potency for evil of spells and incantations, and punished such things with all his might. At a hint of sorcery his passions conquered him and the sinner died horribly. His appetite in this unfortunate matter grew by what it fed upon, and when he was not

fighting his country's enemies, Valentinian pursued a policy of suspicion and private persecution that caused his subjects much suffering and uneasiness.

"In fact the Emperor would make a very good tiger," said Arcadius, on one occasion, when Marcus was discussing Valentinian privately with his son.

"And meantime," answered Marcus, "he is a very good Christian. Ferocity cannot be denied him, but neither can a keen sense of justice and a fair measure of tolerance for those who follow the old creed in a respectable and orderly manner. To be master of the world is a situation which demands the utmost sympathy and forbearance. At the same time one laments his propensity for pouncing—tiger-like again—on the most harmless and well-meaning people. He kills his subjects needlessly—from the highest motives, but on insufficient grounds. His immense vitality shortens the vitality of a great many other people."

"Tell me more about him," said Arcadius, who always loved the speech of his father.

"Valentinian affords an amazing example of the manner in which good and evil are mixed in our human clay," replied Marcus. "Consider his greatest friends—those who stand foremost in the imperial regard. First there is Maximin, that ruthless man of blood, whose cruelties stain the age and who, for his slaughter of our noblest and best, has won the Emperor's affection and the prefecture of Gaul. Next in order come a brace of hyperborean bears. Oh, melancholy thought that the annals of a great monarch shall be blotted by these two ferocious ministers of crime! Fierce they are and insatiable of blood. He keeps them in cages near his own bedchamber, and gratifies his baser nature with the spectacle of malefactors thrown alive into their horrible embraces. They are named 'Innocence' and 'Mica Aurea,' and their royal master himself superintends their diet, their exercise and their toilette."

"I will go and talk to 'Innocence' and 'Mica Aurea,'" declared Arcadius, but his parent forbade him.

"Even if you were permitted to do so, grave harm would result," he answered. "You who grow to wisdom and understanding in the cult of Pan, might prevail with these bears and temper their native brutality; but rest assured that any falling off in that particular must awaken acute suspicion in the monarch. He would at once smell witchcraft—with results for yourself, my son, we need not dwell upon."

"I will not go and see 'Innocence' and 'Mica Aurea,'" promised Arcadius.

His parent then proceeded:

"Now consider the reverse of the medal and learn how contrary is man's nature. This same Valentinian, who loves Maximin and sleeps within sound of the growl of his bears and the howls of their unhappy victims, has done—what? He has condemned and forbidden the exposing of new-born infants—a practice I have long deplored. He has established fourteen skilful public surgeons and physicians in the fourteen quarters of Rome. He, knowing his own lack of education, has

promoted with liberality the instruction of our youth. He smiles upon professors as well as bears, though, for that matter, professors themselves are often bears enough. These dispensations extend to the Provinces also, and there is a joyful though tremulous stir among the learned. Long may it last! And finally—an everlasting honour—he declines all theological debate. He declares himself the sovereign, not the slave, or shuttlecock, of his clergy. Pagan, Jew, Gentile—in fact everybody—is permitted to save his soul in his own way. He is exceedingly—many will say dangerously—large-minded, and has actually sanctioned the Eleusinian mysteries to the Greeks. Even I have always felt a little qualm about the Eleusinian mysteries. But then I do not love the Greeks and never did. If Valens can keep the religious factions as happy in the East, it will be good news. I doubt his power, however. There is already a spice of persecution in the Christians of the East, and one hears of unpleasant self-assertion among the Arian prelates. At Alexandria and Constantinople the

Arians force their Sacrament down the throat while the mouth is held open with pincers; the breasts of women are crushed with leaden weights and branded with red-hot iron to the glory of God; in the Church of the Holy Apostles the Arians and the Orthodox have fought so horribly that their blood has flowed in a torrent down the steps of the western façade into the market square. And one Sebastian at Alexandria has caused virgins to be beaten with thorn branches till many perished. This battle is over a simple letter, an *iota*. They embrace the divinity of the Holy Ghost and much resent the attitude of other princes of the new Church, who decline to do so. The Arians have baptised Valens, however, and that should determine the matter in their favour."

Then a fit of coughing checked the flow of his discourse. Arcadius brought his father fruit and patted him on the back, so that presently the elder caught his breath again.

"And should you think Valentinian was a happy Emperor?" asked the boy.

"He is happy in his duties, my son; but exceedingly unhappy in his recreations," answered Marcus Pomponius. "People have an idea that if they do their duty, happiness will follow as a matter of course. But this is not so. Valentinian knows it and seeks happiness with his bears, 'Innocence' and 'Grain of Gold.' He is a very great man undoubtedly, but not great enough to abandon the myth of happiness. Yet only youthful or second-rate minds pursue this false fire, and when we see middle-aged folk trotting industriously and even hopefully after happiness, we appraise their parts and put them in their places. The adult sheep no longer dances on the pasture, and the calf, not the cow, gambols with its four legs in the air together. Shall we be less intelligent than they?"

## IV

## *GLOOM*

MARCUS POMPONIUS kept his household gods in the temple of Rhea-Cybele. They had stood of old within the atrium, but Placidia did not much like them there, and at a time when they had been married but a few months, to please his wife was easier for Marcus than now. Therefore the Lar—a bronze statue to Tiberius Pomponius, the founder of the clan—and the Penates—two gracious but archaic figures of red granite, bearing garlands—were all removed. And now they would be moved again, for the father of Arcadius had built a new and fair house of white marble and cedar, richly adorned and dedicated to Pan. He knew that his son must worship here, and learning from Valentinian himself that there was no objection, raised this beautiful temple and

transferred the household gods thereto, that they might be under the eye of Arcadius in years to come. Pan himself consented to visit the dwelling raised in his honour.

At dusk, when the great night moths were sucking honey from the garlands, he came, sat with Arcadius and his father for an hour and ate some of the yellow figs for which the fruit gardens of Pomponius were famed.

Pan praised his temple and approved the piety that had raised so beautiful a monument.

"It may interest you to learn," he said, "that this is the last sanctuary made by the hands of man that will ever be erected to me. Other temples I shall continue to have; but here is the final memorial to be lifted by the purpose of devout mankind."

He spoke with that directness and lucidity which is proper to godhead. Indeed when discussing Marcus to his face, Pan caused him some uneasiness, for the good soul, while he knew the truth of what he heard, had covered up these facts with the decency of a patrician, who likes not to wash his dirty linen in public

company, or even in private thought. His position he accepted and merely hoped that other people were not so much alive to it as himself. But Pan spoke forthrightly.

"You must not expect to live much longer, Marcus Pomponius," he said. "Your vitality was somewhat low from the beginning, and you have been hen-pecked and mother-ridden for fifteen years. The ladies, who love you so well, both enjoy a superb fulness of life, and between the upper and nether millstones of their devotion your attrition is nearly complete. The idolatry of your mother and the worship of your wife have, in fact, added twenty years to your existence. In a measure the fault is your own. Latona should have gone to the dower house when you wedded; and you knew it; but these things will be as they will, and you could not modify your own weak disposition, or take precaution against your perils. You have, however, the satisfaction of knowing that the gods will last your time; but Arcadius must live to see grave changes. You have escaped much. Placidia and Latona never fought for

your soul. That might have happened; but our early Christians still echo the tolerance and patience which mankind inherits from philosophy. This will quickly pass from them with access of power. The new religion must harden into authority and freeze into tyranny, for the strong are seldom patient or tolerant, and Christianity will not long endure to see devout spirits at any altars but her own."

"I would perish for Rhea-Cybele," declared Marcus.

"You will not be invited to do so," answered Pan. "To die for a dying cause wins no fame, since there are none to applaud. Julian will be exceedingly unpopular for the next two thousand years or so, because he sought to breathe life into the moribund."

"Does it matter?" asked Arcadius.

"To the fame of Julian, yes," answered Pan. "Indeed there are clouds now forming to drift so thickly over the world and all its accepted heroes and sages that most of them must entirely disappear for a considerable time."

"The heroes disappear!" gasped Marcus "Why, the ambition of the day is a world that shall be fit for our heroes to live in! People speak of eternal peace and shutting the temple of Janus indefinitely."

"It will certainly be shut," answered Pan, "but that is not going to spell eternal peace for the Empire, I assure you."

"I hope not," replied Marcus, who, though not warlike, enjoyed to see the martial spirit as displayed by others. "A world fit for heroes to live in should surely never be a peaceful world. Not heroes themselves talk thus, but the plebeians, whose highest dream is security. Security is no ideal for the great. Only the lowly born desire it."

"And why, my friend?" asked Pan. "Because they have never known such a thing. The powerful and safe take their security as a matter of course: their ideal is to live dangerously; but the poor, who do live dangerously, because they can no other, yearn before all else to be able to trust to-morrow. And this is what Christianity promises they shall do."

The god turned to Arcadius.

"So it is with all happiness—concerning which you are so interested. The criterion of happiness is that it should never have been consciously tasted. Therefore man is seldom happy in the present. Looking back he says, 'I knew happiness then and was unaware'; gazing into the future he sees the ghost of things to be and cries, 'I shall be happy when that happens.' It happens, but brings along with it a score of other happenings to cloud the anticipated sunshine."

"In fact when you are really happy, it appears that you don't know it, Mighty One," said Arcadius.

"Very often, my son. Consider the lowly matter of perfect, bodily well-being—the highest physical happiness. Who revels therein until it is lost and memory reminds him of perfect digestion, long-sighted eyes, dreamless sleep, scorn of fatigue?"

"Most true, dear God," sighed Marcus Pomponius. "I impress upon this boy," he continued, "that happiness is less than

serenity, and endurance greater than contentment. The intelligent man cannot be contented with things as they are; but he can keep his nerve, seeing that to lose it advances no cause."

"Let us have discipline without tears," answered Pan. "And now I must be going."

He took his leave of them and blessed father and son generously before doing so.

"Say nothing of this solemn occasion to your stepmother," advised Marcus, when he was alone with his lad. "It would give her no pleasure, unfortunately."

They had sat long into the dusk and a chill wind blew through the pillars of the temple. Marcus shivered slightly, and prepared to return to the house. But he had caught a cold, and at dead of night Arcadius mounted a strong horse and galloped off to Rome, that he might summon disciples of Galen; for his grandmother roused him in the extremity of grief to say that Pomponius appeared to be seriously ill.

With youthful ardour and ignorant of medical etiquette, Arcadius roused no less than ten eminent practitioners, and hearing who suffered, not one of the ten delayed a moment. A procession of chariots whirled off to the Pomponian villa, and before morning light the cream of the profession stood beside the couch of Marcus.

They agreed that nothing of any consequence was the matter, retired to consult, tossed up who should send a bolus, and when the lot fell on Lucius Curtius Rufus, handed the case over to him.

He quickly cured his patient of a slight bronchitis; but catarrh followed: Marcus could not sleep in comfort, and developed a very trying cough.

The physician suggested a change, and his patient took it. He went to the sea, and rather wished for Arcadius as sole companion, but neither his wife nor his mother would dream of such a thing. Both accompanied him to Ostia, and though he and Arcadius poured libations to Neptune in secret, and Arcadius,

boating among the islands, saw and fell in love with a blue-haired nereid, Marcus came home nothing bettered.

When the winter returned, there fell a day upon which Pomponius declined to get up, and an event so unparalleled caused utmost consternation. The janitor hastened at once for Lucius Rufus, and a very painful incident marked the occasion, for the sick man begged —nay commanded—both his wife and mother to leave his apartment, while he insisted that Arcadius should remain. Both noble women bitterly resented this indignity, and they walked up and down the atrium waiting for the doctor and quarrelling between themselves in a very afflicting manner.

"It's all your fault," said Placidia. "You have pandered to him over this wretched boy. The thing was an outrage from the beginning, and instead of killing it with ridicule, as I endeavoured to do, you let it go on until Arcadius has become far more to my husband than I am—or you either."

"You are mistaken," answered the elder,

" and if you talk so loudly the servants will hear you. Marcus never abated in his love of me. Can a mother——? "

" Not too much ' mother,' please," answered Placidia in her metallic tones.

" It is your gothic want of refinement rather than failure of offspring that has chilled Marcus toward you," replied Latona, and her daughter-in-law flamed furious at so grave an insult. They both forgot themselves, to the secret entertainment of menials who were dusting the statues. Placidia failed to remember that she was a daughter of the house of Spartianus ; and for two pins the infuriated mother of Marcus would have slapped the younger's blazing cheek.

" This cannot and shall not go on," said Placidia, stamping her sandalled foot. She had been making the same remark for fourteen years.

" Not if his mother can help it," replied Latona.

" Things have now come to a climax and I will tolerate no more," declared Placidia.

"When you have borne half as much as I have, it will be time to stamp," retorted the matron.

Then Lucius Rufus hastened through the entrance with a bag of healing drugs, and, at the same moment, Arcadius descended from his father's chamber. For the villa boasted two storeys and was famous on that account.

"Marcus Pomponius is dead!" cried the boy. Then he flung himself on the ground and wept. Rufus ran upstairs, so fast that his tunic fluttered. He was followed by the distracted women; but the physician came too late. The patient had passed peacefully away with his head on the breast of his son.

. . . . .

The Pomponian burial ground lay within the boundaries of the estate, and on the forenoon of the eighth day after his death, they bore Marcus to the grave. Pontifical law regulated the details, and torches—the funeral symbol—blazed wanly under the sun's eye. Since his family was honorata, and members thereof had held curule offices, a considerable

amount of pomp and ritual accompanied the obsequies. Lictors were present and the city fathers. Valentinian himself sent a royal representative, not because he much admired Marcus, but out of honour to a race that had done the state good service.

Beside the dead man's coffin sat a life-sized wooden doll clothed in his garments and with a waxen face that closely resembled him. A procession of 'ancestors' accompanied the funeral—living men clad in the insignia and wearing the masks of the mighty dead Pomponians. Ten musicians blowing instruments of brass led the way; but there were no dancers to amuse the spectators, because the funeral was private and only dignitaries of Rome, the family and the family servants attended it. The officials of the temple of Libitina had been duly notified, and they ordered and arranged the ceremony with their usual tact and attention to detail.

Placidia and Latona walked behind the dead and Arcadius walked behind them.

So they laid Marcus Pomponius in the marble

vaults of his mausoleum under its grove of sighing cyprus, strewed white flowers upon him, chanted a dirge and then partook of the funeral feast laid, according to custom, within the dwelling of the dead.

Nine days later a distinguished gathering revisited the house of the sleepers, offered a sacrifice to the manes of the departed and consumed a dreary little meal of eggs, lentils and salt. Then they doffed their mourning attire and faced life once more.

The dead man's will caused a measure of pain to the wife and mother of Marcus.

For Latona indeed he had amply provided, but in the case of his wife, knowing exceedingly well that Placidia would remarry as soon as expedient, he made no very elaborate provision. She had long been an object of admiration and desire to Claudius P. Mamertinus, an elderly and Christian senator of good repute ; and since this excellent man possessed great wealth, Marcus acted accordingly.

Arcadius was his heir, but until the lad donned toga virilis, Latona was appointed

guardian of the estates and revenues; while for the rest, Marcus expressed wishes concerning the freedom to be given certain slaves, together with a multitude of little remembrances to his friends and staff.

It is pleasing to relate that the mother and wife of the dead man became entirely and beautifully reconciled upon his passing. No harsh word ever passed between them again, and when in due time her daughter-in-law celebrated marriage with old Mamertinus, Latona in a tolerant spirit worthy of her race, attended the Christian ceremony and gave the bride a very handsome necklace of pearls and aquamarines set in silver. These well accorded with Placidia's somewhat frosty charms.

Arcadius, though not invited to the wedding, despatched a gift from the Pomponian heirlooms by the permission of his grandmother. For, thought he, "My father liked this woman well enough to wed her; therefore there must be virtues in her which have not met my inexperienced eyes."

The lad mourned beyond the allotted term, watered his couch with tears and cruelly missed the tender soul who had welcomed him with such paternal kindness and lifted him from a humble vine-dresser into his present splendid position.

As time passed, Latona found herself much drawn to her grandson and imagined in him paternal evidences of Marcus which did not actually exist, for Arcadius favoured his mother. But the young man's reverence for his father's spirit and devotion to his memory gratified Latona, while the ability and good sense of Arcadius made her sanguine that she might live to see him revive some of the vanished glories of the race.

He constantly mentioned his twin brother, and longed that life would bring them together; but seeing that the unknown was not of the old faith, Latona rather trusted this might not happen.

## V

## *"INNOCENCE," THE BEAR*

"RELIGION," said Pan, "is with us that we shall not perish of too much truth. The spirit quickens, and man was driven to invent ghosts, since without them he could not explain either his past, his present, or his future. People find themselves safer if they live in a cage of religion, and as long as they do not make faces through the bars at other people in other cages, no harm is done. But cages are apt to be stuffy and the fumes prove very unfavourable to honesty. In time to come men will leave their cages and be brave enough to face truth without perishing of fright. For the present mankind is still in his childhood, and truth may prove a very ugly customer while you are too ignorant to recognise it as such."

The god sat and watched Arcadius as he

spoke, while with hammer and chisel the lad prepared to carve memorial words upon his mother's tomb. It stood in a little grassy dingle, and round about red roses blossomed during Summer, while the herbage was woven with hyacinths and narcissus at the Spring.

An experience painful in one direction, fruitful in another, had overtaken Arcadius. A day came when he nerved himself to enter his father's little study—a chamber that opened out of the temple of Rhea-Cybele and had, in death as in life, been forever sacred to Marcus. Here for many years he proceeded with his great composition—a work destined, as he explained, to confound Lucretius and his impieties. Arcadius expected to find the achievement at least near completion, and himself having no learning to measure such a masterpiece, proposed to submit the manuscripts to men of letters, who had known and loved his father. But not a manuscript appeared—not a note—not even a copy of the Lucretian poem itself! In truth Marcus Pomponius had never read *De Rerum Natura*

and had never wanted to do so. His alleged book was a myth, a blind, an excuse for solitude, a means of peace, an escape from too pressing reality. Arcadius felt stunned at this singular discovery, but he recovered after a while, made an examination of the chamber and found, hidden in a cupboard, copies of many original squibs, satires and verses of a very personal and licentious character, which professional poets and publicists had conveyed to Marcus with their affectionate greetings. He patronised these people, and they rewarded him with their most caustic achievements. Even had printing been invented, these things had never won to it, for they were quite unprintable.

Arcadius blushed at such audacities, for he was too young to take pleasure in them. He burned all the effusions, and then, seeking farther, came across some very mild literary efforts on the part of his vanished parent. They were quite devoid of offence, unless futility itself be an offence. Marcus had evidently desired to compose a pleasant line

for the stele of Aurelia, and various unsuccessful attempts appeared.

These the lad collected, and knowing from a natural taste that none was worthy of his mother's grave, yet, for his dear father's sake, felt minded to set one upon it. He took them to Pan, therefore, and read them to his indulgent deity.

"Aurelia loved pearls, herself a pearl above all price.
Now she is dissolved in the cup of the gods."
"Aurelia is dead. Hold higher the torches
lest my tears extinguish them."
"My heart was empty until Aurelia made it her jewel
box. Now it is again empty."
"Fear not, Aurelia, that the flowers which spring from
your grave shall ever lack for water while I have eyes."
"Here lies all Aurelia
and most of Marcus."

"Dear me," said Pan, "is that the best your poor father could do?"

"I'm afraid so," answered Arcadius. "I feel they are not very good myself—still——"

"Carve the last," directed Pan, "and if ever you have occasion to compose a funeral sentiment, study your Greek anthology before

making the attempt. Consideration of what has already been done may deter you; for one of the first uses of good poetry should be to stop people from writing bad. Instead, however, it appears to act contrariwise. Man is an imitative animal, which, of course, accounts in a large measure for his civilisation; but in art this is a danger. Thus all schools are perdition, whether of the arts, or philosophy. They produce disciples, who merely think and act in the line of the didactic will that controls them, and good men, capable of some little originality, are often thus destroyed. Tradition, admirable in some categories, is death to art. The really great man should be complete in himself and blaze solitary, like a star upon the sky. Such, of course, alone matter. Mankind pay too much respect to the imitators; and another base mistake they make is often to cast an original spirit into some school and so lose him, whereas, if better understood, he might be found a phœnix, accounting to and accounted for by none but himself."

Arcadius partially understood these opinions.

He was in an egotistical frame of mind, as the sorrowful are apt to be, and now he asked a question as he began to draw letters on the marble of his mother's tomb.

" Shall I ever be happy again, Great God ? " he inquired.

" Still harping on happiness ! Yes, you will be happy again, my lad—happier than you yet have been."

" That is utterly impossible, Divine One, now that my dear father is no more."

" Memory runs clearer as it rolls deeper," answered Pan, " and there is a precious human instinct to preserve the impression of happy hours, but let the dark ones grow dim. You are too young as yet to benefit from this principle ; you are also too young to taste the highest happiness reserved for man—that acme of sensation, that quivering lightning of emotion, that quintessence of feeling called love. This tornado has yet to sweep over you and submerge everything that went before it, as the flood of Zeus drowned all the world, till Deucalion and his wife landed from their

coffer on Parnassus. Happiness and misery are states, not conditions. The weather of life must ever be changing."

Arcadius began to carve, and Pan continued.

"Some time ago I met a miserable little bird. She was the skylark's mate and had built her nest in the scrub of dwarf lavender upon yonder hill. But while she hopped here and there, refreshing herself and resting from the labours of incubation, there came a bearded goat—a careless, old devil with heavy hooves and yellow eyes. Lifting himself to get a bite of juniper, the fellow thrust his hind foot into the lark's nest and made a sorry mess of her five eggs. Thus were five skylarks lost to the air, and sadly torn a mother's heart.

"The father lark descended from his aerial singing and, when I met them, both were talking to the goat—wild, whirling and bitter words. But the brute was aged and rheumatic and didn't care an obolus for what he had done. He said that the larks should not build their silly nests on the ground, and implied

that they had only themselves to thank for the disaster.

" To-day I have seen those birds again. The lady has built a new nest and laid some more eggs ; her lord is aloft as usual, thrilling the blue Spring air. Their sorrow has passed and they are perfectly happy—for the moment."

" Why do they build their nests on the ground ? " asked Arcadius.

" That I cannot tell you," answered Pan.

" Cannot or will not, Mightiest ? " inquired the lad, who was on terms of the dearest affection with his god.

" Cannot," replied Pan. " There are many things of which I am ignorant, for even the immortals have their limitations. It is the worshipper who knows everything, not the god. That, however, must be no story for your ears at present. Faith serves youth well enough. Have you any of those yellow figs your late father gave me ? "

" The tree flourishes ; but it is still the early Spring, blessed One."

" I seldom perform a miracle," answered

Pan, "and when I do, like it to be a good one. Seek the tree."

Arcadius dropped his tools and went to the fruit garden half a mile distant; while Pan picking up mallet and chisel, completed the inscription on Aurelia's monument before he returned.

The young fellow came back with a laden basket.

"The tree is covered with magnificent fruit!" he cried.

"Say nothing about it, however," answered Pan. Then he ate of the figs, blessed Arcadius and prepared to depart.

"I shall not see you again for some time," he said. "Much will have happened to you and the rest of the world before my return. You may, I hope, have increased in wisdom and understanding, and donned knowledge with the toga virilis which you are soon destined to wear."

Having thus spoken he went his way.

Three days later Arcadius took a wallet of victuals and a cloak of sheep's wool. Then he

set out, to live alone with his thoughts for a week and establish his mind in the light of that manhood which would presently be his. He wandered to the Alban Hills and there a remarkable and dangerous adventure befell him.

We know, from the Valentinian historian, Ammianus, that the Emperor's two bears did their sovereign's will with punctual obedience, and we also learn from the same vigorous scribe, that a time came when " Innocence," the great he-bear, was rewarded for his bloody activities with freedom. Valentinian, though terrible under certain promptings of his many-sided genius, has always appeared to be a just terror, and, considering the record of his faithful bear, he determined at length that the brute had earned liberty and a dignified old age in such salubrious and savage haunts as he might select.

" Innocence " was therefore set free to roam in the forests of the Alban, and the Emperor, setting a gold band about his mighty neck, took friendly farewell of him and bade the

monster depart in peace. This fact was known to Rome, and Arcadius had also learned it; but he did not associate the incident with his own pilgrimage to the mountains; nor in any case had he felt fear from the possibility of a clash with Valentinian's old servant.

Yet boy and bear met and in this manner.

Arcadius was sitting upon a stone in a pine clearing, reflecting upon the insecurity of life and turning over the somewhat sharp words he had just heard from a magpie. The magpie, having captured a wounded starling, was hammering the life out of it with his chisel-beak, that he might dine. Whereupon, challenged by the scream of the victim, and without stopping to reflect, Arcadius had leapt forward and ended the unequal contest. The half-dead starling crawled under a thicket to perish; the magpie turned upon Arcadius and showed him his error.

"Fool!" he said. "What have you done? The starling was already at death's door with a broken leg and wing. A few moments would have put him out of his misery, which now your

blunder only serves to prolong without forestalling. Thus you have added to the suffering of the world and delayed my dinner—why? Because you wanted to be kind to yourself, not the starling."

The youth had nothing to answer, but turned away sadly: and now he sat, debating the matter and feeling the magpie to be right.

Meanwhile "Innocence" was also reflecting close at hand; but he always thought better on the move, and his prowling brought him swiftly to the glade.

He had been a free bear for several months and, like many of his betters, began to find that liberty is not all it vaunts itself to be. The wild woods were excellent and life in the open very health-giving. He lost his mange, hardened his muscles and became more formidable than ever; but problems presented themselves unknown in his palace cage. Out of his happiness, in fact, grew that inevitable little worm of anxiety which so often accompanies fancied independence and proves the state of the free-lance to be only relatively perfect.

Thus "Innocence" was excogitating like puzzles with Arcadius when they met.

The question of malefactors especially disturbed this bear. In the royal enclosure malefactors had never lacked. For breakfast, luncheon, tea and dinner the malefactor could be counted upon with certainty; but here, on the Alban ranges, there also harboured many malefactors; only they took a great deal of catching, and the difference between a captured and a free malefactor he found to be prodigious. Fleet-foot malefactors often escaped him, and worse: there were malefactors who dared to strike back; there were malefactors who wanted the gold necklace which he wore to mark his sovereign's gratitude; a malefactor had once wounded him painfully in the spare ribs with a knife, before the wretch was overpowered and devoured. This tendency to retaliate on the part of provisions puzzled the ursine mind; and there were other thorns in the couch of liberty also.

"Innocence" speculated without enthusiasm on a day when he might grow old and

slow, his sight deceive him, his teeth play him false, his appalling hug become less conclusive. He even pictured the possibility of a malefactor—desperate, dead to reverence, decency, tradition—doing him in altogether. At his weakest moments he considered the desirability of returning to Rome. He grew morbid and even dared to wonder whether Valentinian's gift of liberty was all that it seemed. Had the Emperor tired of him and taken this subtle step that he might start another and perhaps more showy bear? Moodily revolving these points, "Innocence" emerged into the glade and his eyes brightened at the sight of a solitary malefactor sitting on a stone with his back turned. The man was moreover unarmed and defenceless—as malefactors should be.

He crept on his belly towards the prey and was about to spring and incapacitate Arcadius before making a meal of him, when the lad turned, perceived his peril, leapt to his feet and accosted "Innocence" in his own language.

"Wait—wait—wait!" he cried. "I'm a friend!"

"A friend in need," answered the bear, with a certain rough humour. But he hesitated and his dinner was lost. Another puzzle confronted him; for how came it about that this person knew his speech—a tongue which Valentinian himself had never acquired?

"Where did you learn bear talk?" he asked. "Answer instantly, before I devour you."

"Where should I learn it?" replied Arcadius. "There is only One who could have given me this valuable aid to culture. Before his name I beg you will shut your terrible mouth and sheathe those magnificent claws. In a word—Pan, my god as well as yours."

"Not at all," answered "Innocence"; "I am a Christian bear."

Arcadius approached and patted his huge head with a kindly hand.

"I recognise you," he said. "You are the Emperor's famous pet. To meet you is a great privilege; but when you say you are a Christian, think twice. Keep an open mind, as

Valentinian himself does. The Christians, let me tell you, are giving him a great deal to think about. They quarrel very strenuously among themselves, and he makes law after law to check their enthusiasm. The friends of tolerance are in a minority among the rising sect, and the orthodox party are doing dreadful things to those who do not see the faith with their eyes."

"How is Valentinian?" asked the bear. "I thought, perhaps, some day he might look me up."

"Far too busy," replied Arcadius. "At present he is across the Alps chastening the Allemanni. We are fighting in Germany, Britain, Africa, on the Danube and in the East. It is rather an unhappy world I fear."

"Do you chance to know how 'Grain of Gold' is getting on without me?" asked "Innocence."

"'Mica Aurea' has a new husband," answered Arcadius.

"Just what I expected," growled the other. "A lazy and a greedy brute was she. Nobody

liked a tender malefactor better; but I had to do all the work."

"What of the Alban bears?" inquired Arcadius. "No doubt you are their king?"

"Not in the least," answered "Innocence." "They are a primitive, unsocial crowd and quite uneducated as to the value of leadership. I offered to be their monarch and explained the advantages; but the barbarians have decided against my suggestion. Their elementary view is that they have always struggled on well enough without a king and may continue to do so."

"They don't understand what they are missing?"

"They don't understand anything," answered the big bear. "One can hardly get down to their level of intelligence."

"Of course to be their king would prove a great convenience to you," suggested Arcadius.

"Obviously. They would reap the benefit of my knowledge and experience and civilised way of looking at life, while I should be waited upon, honoured and pampered as of old. Take

honey. Much honey used to be served to me in a silver dish. I need it, and it is good for me; but here, if one wants it, one must find it and then run the gauntlet of a myriad infernal, little, stinging creatures that infest it and apparently object to me for taking it."

"They are bees and they make the honey," explained Arcadius.

"Do they? Well they have yet to learn that honey was meant for bears, not bees. Let them produce it by all means; but I consume it."

"That is the question of Capital and Labour in an elementary form," answered Arcadius. "I'm afraid you have a reactionary mind; but to dwell so long at Court may have given you a bias. We must live and let live."

"A good motto for grass eaters," admitted "Innocence"—"not much use to me."

"I will send you some honey," promised Arcadius. "I am far from home at present, but shall be returning in a day or two; and if you will trust me, I promise that a very splendid

present of honey shall arrive on this spot at no distant date."

"In the comb," demanded "Innocence."

"In the comb," replied his companion.

"I will trust you, then. And if you see 'Mica Aurea,' tell her, since you have the power to do so, that I am in magnificent fettle, have ten wives handsomer than she, and for all practical purposes find myself the monarch of the Albans. It is far from being the truth, unfortunately; but it will worry her to think so."

Arcadius kept his promise and sent the bear one hundred pounds of honeycomb. Yet the gift did "Innocence" more harm than good, for he ate too heartily and suffered inconvenience and loss of appetite for several days afterwards.

## VI

## *THE ADVENT OF CERES*

A BRILLIANT concourse assembled to see Arcadius don the toga of manhood. The house of Pomponius was popular, and Latona had many friends of high rank. Placidia also accepted an invitation to the festivities. Once more she trod the mosaics which decorated the pavement of her ancient home, and with her came her husband, Claudius P. Mamertinus. The hereditary aristocracy of Rome was present or represented at the festival, and though certain eminent persons declined to smile on Arcadius, but preferred to regard the Pomponian dynasty as now extinct in its major branch, these purists were accounted no loss. A consul or two attended with sundry officers of state and their ladies.

Entertainment on a grand scale had been provided. Corybantes sang and danced before

the temple of Rhea-Cybele ; while mummers, to the number of two hundred, furnished entertainment on every terrace, and all the famous fountains played and plashed aloft into the summer afternoon. A magnificent banquet accompanied the celebration, and Latona was congratulated upon the splendour of the festa, and the dignity, modesty and beauty of the young man who formed the central object of it.

The actual rite accomplished, Arcadius, in his snow-white toga, moved among the guests and received their friendly greetings with becoming gratitude.

" He is more like Hadrian's Antinous than ever," said Placidia to Latona. " He has certainly developed into a beautiful young man. What eyes ! "

" And exhibits charming little characteristics of our dear Marcus. Indeed he grows more and more to resemble him at heart," answered the grandmother of Arcadius.

She was going to the dower house almost immediately, glad to deliver her responsibili-

ties into hands very capable of controlling them. For Arcadius was able, intelligent and mentally equipped to administer his great patrimony with wisdom, generosity and judgment.

Yet now happened an event calculated to throw him off his balance for a considerable time.

Amid the guests was the proconsul, Æmilius Paulus Severus—a great landowner and vine grower and a man of consideration. With him he brought his wife and his younger daughter, Ceres, a maiden so called after the ancient Italian goddess of agriculture. She was seventeen, with golden hair, a full figure, a perfectly lovely mouth, and untruthful, blue eyes. But these azure orbs utterly belied her, for Ceres was not given to fibbing and told far fewer falsehoods than most girls of her generation. After all, untruth is the only weapon of immaturity against middle-age; and you shall find that, though they habitually employ the devious art against parents and guardians, the young are truthful enough to one another.

Ceres beheld Arcadius, and while her blue eyes grew round and flashed unseen, a brighter flash, also invisible, cut the ambient air, for astride the cupola of the Pomponian mausoleum there sat irreverent Cupid ; and now he winged one silver arrow feathered gold into the bosom of the blonde, while the second, like unto it, transfixed the brown breast of Arcadius. In fact he had not donned his toga virilis for five minutes before love broke through that candid robe.

And when the day was done and Arcadius retired to his couch of mother-o'-pearl and ebony, sleep forgot him and he tossed till dawn in a condition of wonderment. Not the pageants or the music threaded his thoughts ; not the gallant assembly, or the amazing repast ; not the flying dancers, or the humour of the mountebanks ; but one tall girl with a golden girdle, and golden hair lifted above her white forehead in a little tower. Her eyes were like the spring sky ; her lips, red as the flower of Adonis ; the smile upon them, when she was introduced to him, an apotheosis of

beauty. Such visions banished slumber ; and elsewhere, on her bed of ivory with amber decorations, Ceres also sighed ; while in her case the entertainment of the day likewise left no impression. She only saw a tall and stalwart figure, a curly head, dark as night, yet not without night's purple, a straight nose, neat ears, eyes lustrous, mysterious, magical—surely the homes of poetry—full lips, grandly modelled, a wide forehead and a round Roman chin.

After three days—which seemed to him a little lifetime—Arcadius called at the town house of Æmilius Severus, ostensibly to thank the magnate for his visit, in reality to catch a glimpse of the proconsul's daughter.

He was fortunate, for Ceres happened to be playing ball in the garden, and as the visitor alighted from his horse, she saw him and missed an easy catch.

He loitered with her, delighted to learn that her father and mother were from home. And then began a friendship which proceeded

to its conclusion almost as swiftly as Arcadius himself desired.

For the mother of Ceres smiled upon the romance from the first ; and when the mother of Ceres smiled, her father generally smiled also.

The maternal Severus was in truth gratified by the event, for despite the extreme beauty of her younger girl, there was that, until now, in the attitude of Ceres toward man which had led her mother to fear a spinster life. Indeed this instinct appeared in the maiden at a tender age and when she was seven, she had expressed a desire to become a Vestal Virgin. The priestesses of Vesta entered her service before they were ten years old and retired at thirty, after which age they were free to wed if they so desired ; but there was no run upon them ; and indeed few cared to exchange the habits of a lifetime. Her father, however—a long-sighted man—looked ahead and perceived that the service of Vesta presented no great promise for a neophyte at this moment. Æmilius Severus had taken advan-

tage of the tolerance of the times to be nothing in particular himself. He would bow his head and lower his voice when he mentioned the name of Jove; but it meant little, and now he began to talk a good deal about the new faith. He was not yet actually a Christian, but wobbling; and when he entered the fold, he knew that, as a matter of course, his family and household would do likewise. His wife desired this to happen, and so did Ceres, until she fell in love with Arcadius. Then her mind took fire, and since Pan was the young man's patron, she found herself, for the moment, content to hear his glories and proclaim his praise. In some measure her mother was relieved; for Ceres seemed just the sort of girl to get into the hands of one of those fascinating and unscrupulous "advisors" now the fashion among patrician lady Christians—a class against whom Valentinian already fulminated. He had, indeed, made it clear that the ecclesiastical order must not receive testamentary gifts, and confined strictly the legal rights of inheritance; but Valentinian

did not know the new Church, or the fiery enthusiasms of the proselyte.

No difficulties attended the courting of Arcadius and Ceres. The course of true love ran smooth and the great matter sped triumphantly to its predestined end.

He took her to the chariot races and circus ; he drove her in his own chariot to scenes of fame and beauty round about ; he arranged picnics, to which Ceres and her sister came ; but her sister, Phyllis, was already betrothed, and as she brought her lover, they were not in the way and only too ready and willing that the younger pair should be left to their own amusements.

Arcadius determined to propose at his temple of Pan, for luck, and arranged an entertainment which was to be concluded in that manner ; but after all the matter fell out otherwise.

The house of Pomponius possessed a box at the Colosseum and, on the occasion of a performance, Ceres and her mother joined Arcadius therein. The matron left them alone

during an interval, that she might visit friends below, and then Arcadius, overmastered by desire and opportunity, offered heart and hand, and Ceres accepted his adoration with ingenuous delight.

I have stood within the very niche where these twain plighted troth, and from the Pomponian box, which opened in the second tier of the amphitheatre, after some fifteen hundred and fifty years had rolled, have looked upon that majestical cup—the mightiest Roman ruin in the world. Now only pellitory-of-the-wall cushions those rugged stones; ferns and grasses and golden weeds loll from the cliffs and precipices; wild fennel crowns many an arch and broken wall; a carpet of green things is flung over arena and auditorium, and the wind, making a panpipes of the many-tunnelled mass, shouts through a thousand porticoes.

When mother, daughter and future son-in-law returned to the villa of the family, Æmilius Severus was delighted at the good news, pre-

tended a surprise he did not feel and sent for amphoræ of red wine. Everybody knew that this good and successful man possessed the best cellar in the capital, and his Falernian and Cœcuban, his Massic and Surrentina were probably at that date the finest vintages on earth. When any happy or fruitful thing occurred in his life, Severus always sent for a jar of Falernian, and since Fortune often smiled, he opened a good many. But he sipped like a connoisseur and was never the worse.

His daughter had no objection to offer when Arcadius pleaded for a short engagement, and the few months permitted to pass before the ceremony were spent in pleasure and the reception of many congratulations.

Where Ceres went, thither Arcadius also went. They hated to be apart, and daily each woke and desired the other with that sleepless and quotidian longing which is born of love alone.

They attended parties and all manner of entertainments. They also went to services of the new Church together, and assisted at

other religious festivals in Pagan temples. Arcadius sometimes grumbled that every important basilica in Rome was being transformed to a place of Christian worship; but no bigotry marked his own belief, and he was aware that Pan would be the last god to refuse him admission to the centres and services of the new faith. They puzzled him, however, and he found no temptation to be converted; but he was impressed by the deep emotion displayed and by the fervour of the rhetoric and the magnificence of a ritual reflected from the pomps of the religious past. Ceres, however, still prayed to Pan, or said she did. As a matter of fact, such was the splendour of their passion that man and maid did very little praying at this moment save to each other.

They parted a week before the ceremony, not to meet again till their wedding-day, and during that week Arcadius devoted himself seriously to his god, filled the temple of the Pasturer with good things and called upon him day and night.

He blessed the deity for his prodigal gifts and for a happiness that he had not supposed within mortal reach; and Pan, pleased at these seemly and heartfelt devotions, responded in person, joined Arcadius on a still summer eve when the stars twinkled like sparks of green and red fire, and nightingales sang from every olive tree.

Arcadius opened a large and beautiful amphora of his future father-in-law's primest vintage, which he had brought from Rome for the occasion, and Pan drank with pleasure.

"You mortals know a thing or two," he said. "Bacchus gave you the grape, but he never guessed what you would do with it. Between ourselves nectar is milk for babes contrasted with this masterly brew."

"I bless you and worship you more faithfully and enthusiastically than ever, dear God!" cried Arcadius, who was not interested in wine. "I venerate your name and cannot thank you enough for the unspeakable joy and bliss you have poured into my life. When last I saw you, I had never loved, therefore I

had never lived; now I love and, at last, know the very summits and crowns of happiness."

"Love," said Pan, "is like wine, my young friend. To keep, the vintage must be of a high quality from the beginning. But truly it offers perhaps the rarest happiness a man may know, when the ingredients, as I say, are fine. Love, in fact, depends upon the lovers. It can be a very gorgeous thing, and indeed is incomparably splendid at its best; but to be a good lover, a man or woman needs rare gifts. Love triumphs over many mean qualities and transforms the human heart for a season; but it needs rich fuel of character if it is to burn steadily and melt away all those inferior elements of the spirit. The effect of love on temperament is, in truth, more apparent than real; and so, for that matter, is the effect of any other great passion and prompting. But there are men and women permanently qualified and exalted by this adventure; and I hope that you will prove such a man, Ceres such a woman."

"We live for each other," answered Arcadius. "Henceforth my life will be devoted to making Ceres happy, and my highest happiness will be her first thought."

"If that should be the truth, you may consider yourselves a fortunate pair," replied Pan; "but remember that great love is only proved by its power to conquer all else. The fire, as I say, to be consuming, must burn up all lesser things, and still remain, steadfast, paramount, clear, unconquerable in both your hearts. I speak, you note, of 'lesser things,' and the criterion and touchstone of true love is this: that brought to its sublime test, all things are lesser. If love out-grows the thousand temptations and trials which spell every life, then it is indeed the supreme ægis and shield that nothing can pierce—the purest, heaven-wrought armour of the human heart. But such love is rarer than yellow figs in February, my pretty boy."

"Such love is ours!" declared Arcadius.

"Nothing is impossible," answered Pan, "and I am ever the hopefullest of the gods.

Yet remember this : the brighter the sun, the darker the storm-cloud, and it is a quality of all human happiness that the more vivid, intense and superb it may be, the graver those inevitable cares that must accompany it. One happiness indeed is all light and no darkness—of that I may acquaint you at another time—but love, even the most lofty, generous love of man for woman—cannot escape its complement ; and by the way a man faces the adjuncts and accessories of great love do the gods judge him. Love is indeed a tremendous test of humanity. We find that few great men are great lovers. Jove himself admits that he knows not the meaning of the word in its highest signification. But, godlike, he admires the best when he sees it, and steadfast lovers are among those he most generously rewards."

Arcadius grew a little tired of this sermon—so needless as it appeared in his case.

" There is only one woman in the world for me, and only one man for Ceres," he declared.

" Good," said Pan. " But you are not the

first who has held the same opinion a week before the day of Hymen; and you will not be the last. May you be making the same remark with the same conviction twenty years hence, my son."

"Are you coming to the wedding, dear God?" asked Arcadius.

"No," replied Pan. "I shall, however, think of you and may even pipe a little epithalamy. I love you. You have promise; some day you will be tried in the fire and, I hope, prove good metal. But always remember my advice: to treat happiness when it does come, like a master, not a slave. Be dignified even though you are happy. Stop short of satiety, for satiety means loss of self-respect. And remember the worm in the bud. Be prepared for that, then it should not surprise or shock you when it begins to wriggle. The Christians will tell you that happiness is a false fire, though I have known a great many happy Christians, who thoroughly deserved their joy. But they take it, as a dog takes a doubtful bone, with his eye on his master's

whip. Happiness, say they, is no meat for miserable sinners; and that is what they call themselves, though a less miserable cult at present you will not easily find. Happiness they hold a thing that exhausts itself sooner or later, just as do pain, hate, remorse (a horrid new complaint they have invented) or any other human emotion. All that is common to a finite being must be finite, fleeting, subject to change; and only when these shards have been shed, can the true wings open that will waft you to your eternal home. Thus they contend, and there is a measure of truth in these opinions. But they do not take into account the inherent qualities of mankind. It is wise and right to desire better bread than is made of wheat, and everybody who is worth admiration does so; yet meantime this scorn of earth is unreal and breeds a body of very pestilent opinion by running into extremes. You will see these things for yourself years hence."

Arcadius found Pan dull on this evening; but looking back, long afterwards, he better

understood the god in the light of future experience.

His wedding was the most delightful affair. An unclouded sun shone upon it, and the ceremony proceeded after the old Pagan manner. Many of the new faith attended, however, and none but entertained good hopes that the young pair would be blessed in their union and suffer their cup of happiness to run over for those less fortunate.

Within six months from that time Rome mourned the Emperor, for Valentinian lost his temper with the erring Quadi and, in a fit of rage before their ambassadors, burst a blood vessel and departed his tempestuous life. Gratian, his eldest son, thereupon ascended to the throne—a youth of seventeen already famous for many virtues.

## VII

## *HILARION*

A YEAR later Arcadius walked up and down in his silent atrium while yet only the first glimmer of dawn touched the noses of the metal and marble statues in their silent alcoves. A very fine bronze, considerably larger than life, had been erected to Marcus Pomponius, and his son adopted this work of art as his personal Lar. He poured libations and offered portions from the morning meal to the statue, and flowers always stood in tall vases beside it. Now, as he tramped solitary, with strained ears and nerves on edge, he heard the clarion of barn cocks crowing against each other under the first grey glimmer of morning.

"How little they know that somebody is listening to them and weighing the sincerity of their challenges," thought Arcadius. And

then he considered how little any of us know who may be listening to us and weighing our sincerity.

"If we did, perhaps we should not crow so often, or so loud," he said to himself.

A slave brought him refreshment, but he set it before the benignant bronze that represented his father, and still strode up and down until the eastern grey was soaked with silver and the olive orchards over against the dawn began to shiver with light.

Then descended Lucius Curtius Rufus from an upper chamber and told Arcadius that he was the father of a remarkably fine boy.

"All has happened agreeably to Mater Matuta, goddess of birth and dawn," said the physician. "Your wife is in the best possible health and spirits. Eat and drink therefore and praise the gods. In a few hours you may visit Ceres and the babe."

Arcadius, out of the abundance of his joy, instantly bestowed a farm of one hundred acres upon Rufus, who thanked him heartily

and went his way reflecting upon the ill-discipline of the human mind.

" For this gift I have done nothing at all," he thought. " Had a difficult and dangerous task been mine and failure crowned my best exertions, though then I might have deserved such a reward, it is most certain Pomponius had not offered it."

Arcadius in great content sacrificed to Pan, made a hearty meal himself, learned that Ceres slept and her son was accepting the burden of life with good grace, and then set forth to commune with his thoughts upon the mountain-side.

He rambled a few miles and ascended to rough land where peaks and pinnacles of rock broke through the scrub and where lavender and myrtle grew and many small flowers gemmed the herbage.

He reflected upon his first year of married life and found that it had been altogether good. Daily his wife and he became more precious to each other and increased in devotion. But Pan was right: out of that sublime under-

standing there grew care, and Arcadius found that great love breeds fear and puts a man in the power of Fortuna. Yet even these cobwebs were bediamonded, for how delightful after Ceres had suffered from headache, to hear her say it was gone; how pleasant, after she had missed her breakfast, to find her hungry at lunch; how adorable, when she sighed at daybreak, to hear her laugh at noon. Her temper was as level as his own, and she displayed a clear intellect, which added much to his content. Her mind indeed was less prone than his to dwell on what he regarded as serious subjects; but herein he erred, for truly Ceres made no mistake concerning what was serious. She esteemed mathematics above metaphysics, as a good housewife should; she knew the value of money far better than Arcadius, for she had learned that from her father; and she saved her husband a great deal of needless expenditure without causing anybody the least inconvenience. She proved in fact a good woman of business, yet such was her native dignity and kindly nature that

none lamented her methods, or judged her harshly. In matters of religion she worshipped Pan outwardly, but hid her heart.

Now Arcadius, wandering upon an uplifted sheep-track, and bending from time to time to gather a deep blue gentian for Ceres, since that was her favourite flower, came upon a stranger. A monk walked solitary towards him, and at another time he might have resented what he had possibly described as a blot on the landscape; but to-day a monastery of monks had hardly chilled the warmth at his heart.

The stranger was of good presence, tall and well-formed. He carried a little parcel, and wore his cowl thrown back, so that the breeze might blow upon his curly hair. He was dark, with wonderful eyes, bright and melting, a good nose and a thick beard and moustache. From the close curls upon his pate, a circle had been shaved—the tonsure.

"Peace be to this little mountain!" said the young man pleasantly.

"Why not?" asked Arcadius. "The upland is peaceful; so am I; so, I hope, are

you ; though you are, as a matter of fact, trespassing. This is my little mountain."

"Then peace be yours also," replied the monk, "for you are Arcadius Pomponius."

"I am."

"There is no doubt that I trespass," admitted the stranger, "and it is equally certain that if you insist upon it I shall go at once ; but I understood that here I might count upon—not, perhaps, a cordial, but certainly a courteous reception. I was told that, such are your opinions, you permit right of passage to any who would shorten their wayfaring by crossing Pomponian ground."

"Where are you going then?" asked Arcadius.

"I am going to ask a favour," replied the monk with an attractive smile. "The facts are these ; I am a hermit."

"You do not look it," answered the other.

"A cloistered hermit, seeking for some mossy grot, where he may dwell in seclusion, contemplation and prayer. I have come from far. But in the East we hermits, if I may say

so, are getting too thick on the ground. The Thebaid—you understand. Now, to have brother anchorites within half a hundred yards of you on every side is not so much to be a hermit as a rabbit. One's first object is defeated. I am frankly weary of these hermit warrens and have journeyed by many marches and through many adventures to Rome, where your true hermit has something of the charm of novelty. Here I am near enough for pilgrimage of the devout; and here I hope, if you are willing, I may find some modest cavern on this salubrious hill remote from man, but not so remote that the folk of the countryside may welcome me and, in exchange for my prayers, good counsel and aid in matters of the spirit, support my modest physical needs."

Arcadius regarded the stalwart speaker with interest. At another time he might have argued with him and condemned his ideal of isolation; to-day he was in no mood to deny the least or greatest petition.

"I am myself a disciple of Pan," he said.

"I know it," answered the monk with in-

genuous frankness. "Think not that you see in me a fanatic. The man who is a genuine disciple of any deity and profits by his faith, showing its worth before his fellow-man, commands my instant respect. Pray and let pray is a very good motto; and in my opinion it takes most of us all our time to save our own souls. That, at any rate, I am seeking to do. And if you will permit me to continue my task in this beautiful spot, I shall be much obliged to you."

"You won't want to convert my slaves, or anything of that kind? Many of them are already Christians for that matter, and I never interfere with them as long as they do their duty. Too well I remember, in my green youth, being thumped by a hard man because I prayed to my god when I ought to have been looking after his vines. Caius Crassus he was called."

The monk frowned.

"A name that seems familiar," he said.

"And what is your name?" inquired Arcadius.

" Hilarion," answered the recluse. " I, too, served human masters in my youth, and a devout and pious person, finding I had no name in particular, baptised me into my faith under that of a famous Egyptian saint. Some day I hope to be worthy of it."

" Are you setting out for saintship ? " asked Arcadius.

" I have modest hopes," answered the man of God. " We must at least aim high. But the way is long and steep and thorny. Do not think that I feel unduly sanguine. Still, what men have done, men can do."

" What does your parcel hold ? "

" My scriptures, a skull and a change of linen," answered the other. " I am, you must know, a monk who loves everything about him to be sweet and clean. This is unusual, and it has been pointed out to me for a danger ; but I cannot help it. The physical discomfort of being grubby distracts my attention from higher things. We all have got our idiosyncrasies, and I must be a clean saint if I am ever to be one at all."

"I agree with you—so far," replied Arcadius.

"I should, therefore, wish a cave not too far from a purling stream and with a south face," explained the other. "I cannot see why one must be less hopeful of religious mastery because he loves the music of sweet waters and the light of the sun. I may, of course, be mistaken; heavenly monitors may presently direct me to stuffier and less agreeable conditions; but for the moment that is what I seek, if you advance nothing against it."

An emotion, which as yet he failed to understand, drew Arcadius to this young and ardent Christian. Against his better judgment he found himself much liking the stranger, and what was still more curious, he discovered in the eyes and gestures of Hilarion something that seemed familiar.

"With regard to caverns," he said, "there are, I doubt not, half a dozen both dry and commodious upon this hill-slope. One especially occurs to me. It is situated under a grove of arbutus, and at late autumn the red berries fall upon the threshold. Round about grow

asphodel, wild garlic and the orange lily. In spring, white and purple crocuses spear through the green grass, and within a hundred yards, a stream containing little fish meanders, springing from its crystal cradle among the chestnut trees."

"All very good," answered Hilarion, "and not least the fishes; for on a Friday it is my custom to eat a fish, or nothing."

"Unfortunately that cave is tenanted," added Arcadius.

"A pity—indeed a misfortune," sighed Hilarion. "Another hermit?"

"A badger and his mate," said Arcadius.

The monk considered this.

"Then surely one need not despair," he answered. "I submit with all deference that, in such a case, immortal man ought to have a pull over the beasts that perish."

"You think so?"

"What do you think, most noble Pomponius?"

"The beasts certainly perish; and I am one of those who assist them to do so, for I

love sport. Pan, however, did we consult him on such a question, would probably hold that possession is nine points of the law. He would certainly tell me that to eject the badger by mere brute force—the only thing that could do it—is out of the question."

Hilarion debated a view which was strange to him.

"I have not known respect for a dumb animal's security pushed to these lengths," he said. "If it were possible to argue with the badger——"

"It is," replied Arcadius. "I have a great and precious gift from Pan. The badger is no more dumb than you are. For the moment, however, I am a little preoccupied and must be returning home. This morning my wife has given birth to a man-child."

"I congratulate you with all my heart," answered Hilarion, "and I appreciate the great kindness which could prompt you to delay with a stranger at such a moment."

"The curious thing about you is that I do not feel you are a stranger," answered Arcadius.

" Let us walk together, and you shall tell me your story and eat at my table, unless your rule of life prevents it."

" In the matter of eating," replied the monk, " if true friendship salts the food, I ask no more. Be it a lettuce leaf and a crust of black bread, or a patrician repast, all is one to me. And I, too, feel that in your company I am with a familiar. It is doubtless your humanity —the magic gift that draws all men of good will together."

A recollection of a remote evening under the aqueduct, when Pan spoke with him and healed his stripes, flashed into the mind of the young Pomponius.

" Does the name of Cassius Lucanus recall anything to you ? " he asked, and Hilarion's face fell.

" Alas ! it does," he answered. " As a wayward and headlong lad, before the Light had flashed, I ran away from that good Christian, to seek my fortune elsewhere."

" Embrace me then ! " cried Arcadius, " for you are my twin brother ! "

The anchorite dropped his bundle, and the young fellows flung their arms about each other's necks.

"Now I know why the name of Caius Crassus struck a deep note of memory," said Hilarion. "To him you went, and that much I remembered. You are indeed my very twin!"

"Oh that our father had lived to see this wondrous day!" exclaimed the other.

Then for a time they walked silently together.

"Much will spring from such an event," declared Arcadius presently. "Think not that I shall deny your patrimony, Hilarion, for we are one and all mine is yours."

But the hermit was determined upon this subject.

"On that high matter one word is as good as a thousand," he replied. "Once and for all I must continue as I am. This accident, indeed, brings into my life the blessing of kinship and the joy of a loving brother; but no more than that. I am dedicated to the

solitary life for ever ; and if you disapprove, then I shall vanish as I have come. But it will be a needless grief to deny myself this gracious and beautiful experience. I therefore ask you to let me go on as I desire to go, dwell within reach of your dear presence certainly, but live in my own way and cumber not myself with other interests than those which at present occupy me."

" To part from each other is, of course, out of the question," declared Arcadius. " As to details, we can discuss them at another season. For the moment we will approach the paternal roof together, and you shall hear good things about our father. This is a day to be graven in letters of gold for me—a day that brings me a son and brother together. Blessed be the gracious and glorious name of Pan ! "

They went in together, and having eaten, Arcadius approached his wife and child, while Hilarion took a bath. Ceres was delighted to see her husband and rejoiced at his joy ; but he kept the subject of Hilarion from her,

fearing the shock of an event so unexpected might do his wife harm.

He came from the first sight of his son a little chastened, albeit those who understood the matter assured him that the babe showed abundant promise and, indeed, already exceeded most newly born infants both in weight and charm. But he had never seen an object so disappointing.

That night he and his brother related their adventures, and Arcadius strove without success to turn Hilarion from his resolve.

"As well might I invite you to turn your back upon your duty," answered the young hermit. "Providence has willed that you shall be the master of great estates, many slaves, much wealth. You are called to this life, and have entered upon it no doubt steadfastly and wisely. For me such an existence would be dust and ashes. My treasure is not on earth. A lonely grot and a life of seclusion, meditation, devotion and contemplation lie before me. We shall be brothers—each I hope proud as well as fond of the other; but we

must pursue our different paths, fulfil our different destinies, and worship our different gods in sincerity and singleness of heart."

From this attitude Hilarion would not budge, and Arcadius perceived that whether his brother's ambitions were worthy of admiration or no, he designed to follow them. He gazed affectionately upon his twin, and regarded him with the deepest attention. He thus enjoyed the rare experience of seeing himself, for they were amazingly alike, and had the monk but shaved his face instead of his scalp and worn the tunic of his brother, it is certain that no ordinary observer would have known to discriminate between them.

They sat until a late hour and then, though reluctantly, Hilarion consented to sleep in his brother's house.

"I should dearly like to baptise my nephew," he said, "but I suppose that is out of the question?"

"Nothing that could advance my son's welfare is out of the question," responded Arcadius; "but what would be the probable

effect upon him did you administer this rite ? "

" He would be healed of his original sin," explained Hilarion. " You understand that he entered the world a sinner."

" Why ? Can a child do evil in the womb ? "

" It is his human inheritance," declared the hermit. " Every one of us arrives on earth in this unfortunate condition ; because Adam, our first parent, disobeyed his Maker and ate of the Tree of Knowledge, being expressly forbidden to do so. We Christians strive, of course, to see that people shall not continue to eat of this noxious fruit ; and I hope presently we may be powerful enough to prevent them ; but meantime every son and daughter of mankind suffers for Adam's awful disobedience, and not a child can escape this primal taint and consequent destruction save by the way of Christian baptism."

Arcadius clasped his brother's hand and beamed genially upon him.

" They did wrong who told me your faith lacks any touch of humour," he declared.

" Surely it sparkles with rich entertainment for the inquiring mind."

Then they embraced again ; thanked their respective deities for the supreme happiness that had fallen upon them, and presently retired, each to dream with affection of the other.

## VIII

## *THE CAVERN BY THE BROOK*

IN the morning, though his arrival was still hidden from Ceres, Hilarion held the new-born babe in his arms for a few moments and secretly put the Sign of the Cross upon his forehead, when nobody was looking.

Then he took his parcel and set out with Arcadius for the cavern by the brook. Once more the son of Marcus Pomponius pleaded with his twin brother and argued that their father must be grieved, did he know of the young man's determination; but nothing would change Hilarion.

"Have no fear for me," he said, "and though I am sure that our dear father, according to his lights, was an upright and well-meaning man, yet it is idle to pretend that I owe him anything but life. To be a natural son is in itself a matter for profoundest regret,

and knowing that you and I were born in sin, even more than most people, so much the greater is the demand upon us—each in his own way—to make good use of the fleeting years and combat these sad disabilities."

Arcadius felt melancholy at a view of life which appeared to him somewhat morbid if not futile, and Hilarion, as twins will, guessed the other's thought.

"One must be a little hard at the edges and self-centred, brother, if one is to tread successfully the paths of thorns," he explained.

Arcadius made no reply.

They came to the cavern over which sparkled the foliage of arbutus trees and shone their red trunks. The place was bathed in morning sunlight, and at noon this golden splendour penetrated the cave, showing it to be carpeted with white fine sand and roofed with pearly limestone. Within there opened a lesser cave at the heart of the rock, with an entrance two feet high. This hole—dark and carpeted with dry grass—was the apartment of the badger and his lady.

Arcadius called to the creature and he rose from his morning slumber and came blinking into the sunshine—a handsome and attractive beast with a dark, heavy coat and picturesque white and amber streaks upon the sides of his face. His eyes were bright, his mouth large and his teeth long and glistening. He yawned and stretched his hinder limbs; then he sat beside Arcadius, on a flowery bank without the cavern; and what he heard soon woke him completely. He was a badger of more than ordinary intelligence, who had often spoken with the master of the hillside, and knew something about the human race.

Now he listened in growing impatience, and having learned all there was to know, regarded Hilarion with an angry and a snarling countenance.

"This holt," he said, "is mine by every honest principle; and, as a badger with a sense of justice, I can only wonder that Arcadius Pomponius has allowed himself to raise any question about it. I will answer you briefly, and I will then assume the offensive and put

certain points to you that ought to clench the matter. To begin with, I won't go—not for fifty hermits. I absolutely and finally decline to go. I found this place. I have lived here several years and brought up three families in it. I have made it what it is—a home—and if my wife were to learn there was any thought of leaving, I should tremble for her reason. So much for that. Only force ejects me, and I know Arcadius too well to believe that he would employ it. There are thirty-four other caverns upon the Pomponian estate——"

"But not one with a south front near running water," explained Arcadius gently.

"Very well then: I will now assume the offensive," proceeded the badger. "What I should like to know is this: *why* a south front? *Why* running water? What the mischief does this holy man want with a south front and a stream? You tell me that he is one who scorns comfort, chooses to live in a cave for his Maker's glory and seeks the hardest possible conditions for his own future

advantage. That, of course, is his business, and if he is going to get well rewarded for being uncomfortable, I say nothing. But my wife and I shall win no rewards for enduring terrestrial misery. We take, therefore, the best that we can get, and there is nothing in our convictions that frowns on a cosy establishment. Pan showed us this hole and was glad we liked it; so if you fire us out, you quarrel with him. As for the hermit, if he wants real discomfort, why a cave at all? To be logical, he ought to live in the open all the time—winter and summer. It might shorten his life; but no doubt that would be all to the good from his point of view."

"When you come to logic you interest me," replied Arcadius, "and I admit the force of your argument. You see the monk, Hilarion, looks forward to the most exaggerated delights and rewards after mortality is ended, and he proposes to prepare himself for a future good time, without end, by having a present bad time, strictly limited."

"Exactly," replied the badger. "Then let

him have a right down beastly time and not palter with it. Rub that into him, and explain that if he's got the courage of his opinions, he ought to go and live on the top of the hill, where the lightning always strikes. There he would have a short life and a wretched one, which seems to be the summit of his earthly ambition."

But when these things were explained to Hilarion he evaded the dilemma very easily. He was not a religious recluse for nothing, and found himself more than equal to a Pagan and a badger when it came to dialectics.

"I admire your quick intellect, dear brother," he answered, "and admit that this animal seems also amazingly clear-minded in his crude way. There is, however, a vast difference between theoretical perfection and practical holy living. If death could cut the knot, be sure I should not be seeking the hospitality of this limestone cave; and were self-destruction the nearest way out, I had, of course, gone to my reward long ago in North Africa. But you argue on a false and heretical

assumption. Suicide, which the badger so plainly indicates, is no part of a Christian ideal. To destroy myself, by braving the lightning, or by deliberately ruining my health in some more protracted manner, would be a deadly sin and defeat my own high object. I am not going to commit suicide as a short cut to my heavenly home, because such an act would not lead me there. On the contrary it would end at somewhere altogether different. The true art and practice of the judicious anchorite is this : to live as long as he possibly can and as uncomfortably as he possibly can ; but through no deliberate act or unreason to shorten by an hour his allotted years. The more misery here, the larger the reward there ; so we must look after this wretched carnal vessel, nourish and sustain it up to a certain point, pander to its weakness if we may do so without sin, and thus enable it to hold together as long as its Maker originally intended. For that reason only do I desire a place in the sun, for since the heathen have made of it a god, I naturally dislike it; but because warmth, wholesome food

and a dry couch will help to preserve me for my life-long task of meditation, communion and self-denial."

"I see your point," admitted Arcadius.

"We're not going, all the same," added the badger.

"No," declared Hilarion, "you certainly do not go. You have made good your title to this retreat. It is yours, on that ground of simple justice which I share with you. It would be a very unhappy home for me if I thought of you driven from it. The cave is yours most emphatically, and I shall now set about seeking another. Such another as this I do not expect to find; but that is my affair. Rest assured I am a friend—indeed an admirer."

Arcadius translated this, and the badger replied that he was glad the monk saw it so.

"At the same time," continued Hilarion, "there is a golden mean, which we might perhaps explore before I depart. We are here confronted not with one cave, but two. Had that struck you, Arcadius? The badger is a

nocturnal animal; while my activities are confined to the day. His home is within the seclusion of yonder rock; mine would be as it were in his vestibule, or antechamber. By day he lies sequestered, since the day is his night; while when the moon rises, as he fares forth with his better half upon their lawful occasions, I lie on my pallet in slumber. I only give you this idea for what it is worth, but upon my word it is hard to see why we should not share this domicile without let or hindrance one to the other. I should have the privilege of the badgers' sagacious companionship; while they, in return for granting me a lodging, should share such little delicacies and dainties as the piety and good-will of the devotees may bring to my board. How does the idea strike you, Arcadius?"

"Admirable," answered his twin brother, "if you really are content to share a badger's holt for the honour of your Creator. But how it will strike the present tenants I cannot tell you."

"Put it to him as nearly in my words as you

can," answered Hilarion. " Tact is everything in a matter of this kind. Dwell on the delicacies and dainties."

Arcadius, who was also a tactful person, made a good case and indeed went farther than his brother had done.

" If you agree to this suggestion," he concluded, " I shall make it my business to keep this holy man in such abundance that you and your wife will have the time of your lives and simply wallow in the fat of the land."

" Plenty of eggs ? " asked the badger.

" Dozens daily," answered Arcadius.

" He may, however, want them all himself, and deny us," hinted the badger.

" Have no fear ; he is a hermit of unstained probity. He will keep his promises and share and share alike."

The badger began to yield, though sullenly.

" I must consult my wife," he said, and called her.

She came—a beautiful and comely matron.

" An extraordinary offer has been made to

us," began her husband. Then he briefly explained the situation.

"We can but try it," said his wife, who was a creature of placid mind.

"There will be a great deal of unpleasant publicity," grumbled the badger, "don't forget that."

"Not at all," replied Hilarion with assurance. "The devotees will only visit me by daylight, while you are both fast asleep; and when you wake up hungry, I shall be fast asleep, and a delicious repast invariably awaiting you."

"We can but try it," repeated the badger's wife.

And so they determined to do.

The badgers went back to bed and Hilarion unpacked his bundle. He arranged the skull on a ledge near the entrance of the cavern, spread his change of linen on a dry rock, slipped his manuscripts into a cranny, that might have been made for them; and there he was.

Arcadius viewed these simple operations doubtfully.

"Where are you going to sleep?" he asked.

"I shall beg a goatskin or two from some kindly peasant," answered the other, "and until I get into touch with the folk, I shall make my couch of moss. Indeed this sweet white sand is good enough."

"When will you come down to see me again?" asked his brother.

"Never," replied Hilarion firmly. "In all probability for the rest of my natural life I shall not stray half a mile from this spot. Do you perceive how admirably it is chosen? Here are all things that I shall ever need. The necessary devotees can without doubt be counted upon. And if you want to see me, you must come and do so. I shall always be ready to welcome my fellow-creatures between noon and sunset."

His handsome face shone with ardour, and Arcadius, promising to send up a bed of some sort, a warm blanket or two and a basket of provisions, went his way. But melancholy was at his heart, for it seemed that he had found

and lost a dear brother within the space of four-and-twenty hours.

" Don't forget the badgers ! " cried Hilarion cheerfully to the departing figure.

## IX

## *THE CONVERT*

ARCADIUS loved his son so much that he felt the difficulties and dangers of the child's early youth almost more than did Ceres. And thus he began to perceive the truth of Pan: that every new happiness brings its own measure of an emotion, which may indeed not sharpen into sorrow, but is none the less to be described as sleepless care. In the light of paternity he began more clearly to perceive the sterile ambitions of his brother, and while he loved Hilarion better and better as their acquaintance ripened, he much regretted the young hermit's scheme of life and thought him a useful man wasted.

A day came when Ceres visited her brother-in-law, and so like was he to her own husband that she could not choose but love him. He had settled down with great content, and the

fame of him was soon noised abroad. The folk came, at first out of curiosity, expecting that the hermit would prove a dull old bird and no great addition to the hillside from their point of view; but when they found him young, exceedingly handsome, modest on the subject of his own accomplishments and with a kindly heart, they grew interested, attentive and finally rather proud of the new-comer. The maidens were specially drawn, and in their ingenuous fashion brought gifts and stopped to pass the time of day. They struggled among themselves for his washing and mending, and they would bring him embarrassing presents, such as pillows for his couch, socks for his feet and various other little creature comforts which he could not permit himself to accept.

Very soon there stole a shadow into his reflections, for something told him that the devotees were overdoing it, or soon would be. He was not striking the right note. He was not creating that spirit of awe and reverence, or setting that example of religious

austerity that he had proposed. In fact people failed to take him quite seriously. He was not a sanctified recluse so much as a rural entertainment. The people came happily, listened to his wisdom, thought him wonderful for such a boy, and imparted their own deeper sense founded on a lifetime of experience. Many attached great importance to his opinions, however, and several joined the fold of the Church at his advice. He gave them little addresses, and they listened attentively ; but in process of time he found that the older peasants fell away, and, inquiring the reason, learned that they felt him too young in holiness to be of much practical service to their newly found souls. They had quite expected him to work miracles of healing and he declined even to try. Of course he pretended to no such gifts as yet. Therefore it came about that he was essentially a young people's hermit ; for young people will be young, and they cleave to youth for choice.

He accepted the position wisely.

" We will grow up together," he said, " and

increase in wisdom and understanding as the years pass over us. After all, there is no reason why the odour of sanctity should be reserved for middle-age. We all know the sort of goats who join the sheep, only because they are too old to pursue their goatish amusements any longer. Indeed it is easy enough to be a sheep when you have become too old to play the goat. I will be the anchorite of youth! I understand young people and am at least quite wise enough and good enough for them. We will instruct ourselves, deny ourselves, and increase in righteousness together."

He was always dignified, and made it clear that he stood apart from the ways of men. He spent a great measure of his time in private devotion, yet showed himself as ever ready to sympathise with innocent enjoyment and promote lawful happiness in so far as he could do so.

Then came Ceres, and she took a deep and sisterly interest in him from the first. She was charmed with Hilarion, and found the monk an echo of her husband, but by no means

that alone. While he reflected the beauty, vivacity and genial spirit of Arcadius, he displayed in every thought that which his brother concealed: a deep and abiding sense of the unseen; and this lent gravity to his conversation and weight to his sentiments. He much admired Ceres also, and perceived that, despite her great beauty, she possessed a thoughtful mind and wide sympathies. She delighted to discuss the most serious subjects, and asked many questions respecting the Faith. Arcadius, too, satisfied that his brother was enjoying the restricted life that he had chosen, felt at greater ease about him, though the more he saw of Hilarion and the oftener he listened to his pleasant discourse, the more he regretted that his young and attractive twin brother had reserved for his God those gifts which seemed so fitted to advance the welfare of mankind.

For he perceived, without jealousy, that Hilarion was cleverer than himself. The Christian hermit had been severely schooled, and his mind, of course, took its proper colour;

but it was a far-seeing mind—or so it appeared to Arcadius. Hilarion had a gift of synthesis : he linked things together and looked far ahead. He felt that the new religion was in the ascendant ; that its dawn was widening into a glorious day ; that it contained the seeds of life and must soon sweep the nations into one glorious communion of faith and charity.

" It will alter the world," explained Hilarion. " It will abolish war, exalt the dignity of the human race, destroy our class prejudices and awaken that enthusiasm for suffering humanity our martyred Master came to teach and to preach. A time is near when the Cross will supplant our Roman Eagles ; when in that Sign alone man will conquer—not his fellow-man—but his own errors of greed and lust, hate and injustice."

He flowed on melodiously in this fashion, and Ceres felt that if it were known Hilarion was brother of Arcadius and a Pomponian, he might, indeed, make a success of his religion in the highest quarters.

Many merely regarded the Man-God as very well suited to the poor ; but the brother-in-law of Ceres evidently thought his cult equally adapted to the best people ; and she pictured him as taking Christ to the patricians and making a very fruitful business of it. In sisterly fashion she also considered the cavern and made suggestions.

" Winter is coming and you must be prepared," Ceres told Hilarion.

She was tactful, but obstinate, and as time went on, almost before he realised what had happened, the anchorite found very doubtful additions creeping into his cell. Ceres made such a favour of these trifles that he felt it had been churlish to deny her.

" I think as much of myself as you," she said, " and I cannot come and listen to you, or bring the baby, if you refuse to let me hang a leathern curtain against the draughts."

" Why not a little mason's work and a proper door ? " asked Arcadius, but this Hilarion refused.

" My house must not be made with hands," he explained ; " besides—the badgers."

" Well, you won't come to us, therefore the least that you can do is to let it be possible for us to come to you," urged Ceres.

He granted the force of this and so, little by little, the cavern became habitable. A few chairs, for devotees, a Tyrian rug or two, a drinking vessel, platters, an ewer for washing, even hair-brushes—all these crept in.

" How's your landlord ? " asked Ceres on her third visit.

" Both he and his wife are well," answered Hilarion. " Very well and very amiable—at least the female. The boar continues to be a boor. He says—I understand them now—that he grows too fat and his wife too lazy. He declares the fine privacy of the place is gone, and that the devotees keep him awake when he ought to be asleep. This is not true, for nothing ever wakens him but hunger."

" There is no pleasing some people," said Ceres.

She was alone on this occasion, and Hilarion asked after his brother.

"He is gone to see the Emperor," she said. "My husband feels a little uneasy about him."

"Not because he is a Christian, I hope?"

"Oh dear no. Arcadius is far too large-minded to let that influence his thoughts. We are all Christians now—or nearly all. But Gratian doesn't seem to be living up to his high promise."

"How so? From my point of view, he is. He advances the faith gloriously. He is a pious and a noble prince."

"He suffers from flatterers and other parasites. His virtues are the result of education, and do not spring from the heart—so Arcadius fears. He has grown indolent and wants to win glory without working for it. He is ill-advised and delegates his power to worthless people. No monarch can make a greater mistake than that. His conscience is directed by saints and bishops; and your brother fears that this may lead to persecution of those who do not think as Gratian thinks."

"A delicate subject," murmured Hilarion. "Probably you and I should not agree upon it, sister. But surely Arcadius will not dare to say these things to the sovereign?"

"Certainly he will not," replied Ceres. "Nobody knows better which way the wind blows than my dear husband. But he and Gratian are very good friends and they meet much in the hunting field. The Emperor loves the chase and knows that none is a better companion at his pastimes than Arcadius. He has helped Gratian to lay out large parks and fill them with fierce and dangerous game. These things are well suited to a country gentleman without any higher ambition than to be happy—I refer to Arcadius unfortunately—but he is the first to see that an Emperor should take a larger view. To desire supreme excellence in a pastime which his subjects may share is a mean ideal for Gratian."

"True," answered Hilarion. "Yet may his hand only be stained with the blood of beasts. And that reminds me," he added, "I have not yet caught my Friday fish."

They strolled to the stream, which narrowed at a point above a pool and then leapt down—from rocks draped in ferns and violets—into a narrow basin beneath.

" A miracle of a modest kind," explained the anchorite, " for in this tiny pool every Thursday I have but to put my net and a fat carp rewards me. I can only suppose this to be the work of Providence, and it is, of course, gratifying. Already the devotees talk of ' Hilarion's fish.' "

Ceres, however, knew more about the matter than he. There were only minnows and sticklebacks in the stream, but weekly Arcadius had directed a trusty slave to convey one large red carp from his own stew pond to the basin on the rivulet, and weekly Hilarion fished it out, in ignorance of the little deception.

Myths will often spring from a trifle no greater than this ; and right miracles establish themselves on foundation no more enduring than a practical joke.

" When are you going to bring my nephew to see me ? " asked the brother-in-law of Ceres.

" Next spring he shall come."

" What is his name ? "

" You ought to have asked that question long ago," replied the child's mother. " He is called ' Victor Marcus Arcadius Severus Pomponius.' "

" And what do you call him, Ceres ? "

" We call him ' Grillus,' because he chirrups like a cricket," she replied.

" By the time he reaches man's estate, there will not be a Pagan left in Italy," prophesied Hilarion.

" Very likely," admitted Ceres.

He talked on religious subjects and she listened with enthusiasm. Her heart had always inclined to transcendental themes ever since her childish ambition to be a Vestal, and she was already at heart a firm believer in Hilarion's faith. He made its principles attractive, and while dwelling upon their beauty, also insisted that the Kingdom was much nearer at hand than people imagined. Success, he told her, was not easy ; a real triumph argued self-denials, sorrows, tribulations. He perceived

that this side of the picture especially attracted Ceres ; and therefore he dwelt upon it. He spoke many truer things than he knew ; but it is difficult to press the principle of martyrdom while a creed is welcomed with rejoicings and at the stage of its triumphal entry into the souls of men.

In the case of Ceres, however, looking forward, she rather saw the inevitable self-denial and affliction under her own roof. Therefore she hesitated long before taking the plunge. Something of her doubt, on the occasion of a long and earnest conversation with Hilarion, was reflected in the young anchorite's own heart.

" I know how it is with you now," he said, " and I see the difficulty very clearly, for it is probably going to hit me at least as hardly as yourself. If you were to tell dear Arcadius that you feel strongly prompted to become a Christian, he would naturally ask who had strongly prompted you ; and to that question there could be but one reply."

" The sole difficulty is there," she admitted.

"Shall I sound him?"

"On no account. You have awakened my conscience, Hilarion; and my conscience must solve the problem. If my conscience presently speaks a clear word on the subject I shall myself acquaint Arcadius with the fact."

"This is what I meant when I told you it wasn't all roses. The beatific vision is only seen through tears, my sister."

"Yes, I know," said Ceres. "But they ought to be your own tears. True religion can never be selfish. Arcadius, for example, doesn't know the meaning of selfishness."

And at the end of the year, when the weather had turned harsh and Hilarion, with a cold on his chest, was keeping his cell, Ceres found conscience utter no uncertain word.

She broke the matter to Arcadius, while she sat with her baby on her lap before a fire of pine cones in the atrium, and he was placing a bunch of autumn crocuses beside his father's statue.

"I hope Hilarion is better," he remarked.

"I must climb up and see him to-morrow. There ought to be a fire in his den."

"He is better," she answered. "I sent to inquire."

"Dear, mad fellow," said Arcadius. "Won't see a physician, though I should have directed Rufus to look him up and talk sense to him to-morrow had there been no improvement. Surely, at the turn of the year, he might leave his wretched hole and lead a normal life with us for a few months until the sun is high again."

"How little you understand him, for all your love," she said.

"It takes a Christian to understand a Christian no doubt," admitted Arcadius. "I don't —I admit it."

The opportunity was good and Ceres spoke.

In two minutes and a half she had informed Arcadius that she wanted to join his brother's faith—indeed had already done so in spirit—and hungered and thirsted for official admission to the fold.

He took it with his usual large humanity. Indeed it came as no very shattering shock, for where Ceres was concerned, love sharpened her husband's wits, and in his devoted relations with her, he rose to heights beyond him in every other connection of life.

"I will see Pan," he said. "Have no fear. These things must be as they will. I do not think that he will let you be a Christian, for these are not days when a god can lose worshippers without uneasiness; but we may very well trust him. I will call upon him in his temple and ask for a sign. We may safely leave it to him."

"And you won't be angry with Hilarion?"

"No," answered Arcadius, "—not unless my God directs me to censure him. Pan's word, as you know, is my law."

"I hope little from him," confessed Ceres.

"You have trusted him, as you have trusted me," answered her husband; and two nights later, by the blaze of pine torches, he sacrificed, stated the case before the altar of Pan's temple

and prayed for a sign. The divinity, however, came himself and greeted Arcadius with his usual affection.

"Oh, blessed One, it is good to behold you again!" cried the worshipper. "You are never far from my thoughts and I thank you, as you know, for the many good things that happen to me. I thank you for my dear wife, my precious son, my twin brother, who by his image tells me more about myself than I ever knew. For these consummate blessings I adore you; but now, even as you have ever warned me, out of good there rises the threat of things—I will not say evil, but highly inconvenient. Hilarion, as you know, is a Christian and has his own ideas. One of his principles is that a Christian should leave no stone unturned to make everybody he meets a Christian: he told me frankly that this was an abiding rule, and, perhaps wrongly, I raised no particular objection. But a most awkward thing has happened. I have felt uneasy these many days, yet liked not to drop a hint. Now the blow descends upon me. In a word Ceres,

my wife, much desires to be baptised into the new faith. I am therefore faced with two problems involving my wife and my brother. Shall I forbid her in your name and cast my brother out for daring to tamper with her faith? Or shall I accept the situation? Your direction will determine me."

Pan did not immediately reply to these questions.

"I have observed Hilarion," he said, "and sometimes, when none was by, surveyed him unseen. He is a good young man and lives up to his convictions honestly. He is fired with the noblest enthusiasm and, according to the light that is in him, pursues his ideals with a pure spirit. But in my experience I have never observed a successful solitary at his age. The usual plan is to sow one's wild oats in the ordinary manner and then, having proved all things and found them dust and ashes, to seek that which is better. Hilarion has begun at the wrong end. Granted that he never had any wild oats to sow, being born good—a thief of virtue; but there still remains Nature, and

Nature forgets nobody. Neither has she ever shown the least consideration for the gods. Now Nature has not forgotten Hilarion, and while the dear lad thinks he has conquered her and trampled her under his feet, the truth is that up to the present time Nature has not concentrated upon him. She is, however, about to do so. Hilarion will in fact, from being just a little insipid, begin to grow much more interesting. I am fond of Hilarion. I am fond of everybody who is in earnest."

"You cannot, in fact, reach saintship by following your own bent, no matter how noble that bent may be?" asked Arcadius.

"Of saintship I know nothing; of manhood everything," replied Pan. "Hilarion is a man and a good one. He believes himself to be in the right; and he is in the right to a considerable extent; but he might be much righter. So might you; so might everybody—saints included. By all means permit Ceres to become a Christian—smile on it; respect her predilections; keep her up to the mark. None may love or worship one god if her soul has

gone out to another. If she desires to be a Christian, Ceres cannot longer call herself a Pagan, and lip service is a vain thing—only poisoning the heart of such as offer it.

"There is a common human weakness: to imagine that your own, particular age has some special importance in the progress of affairs; but, for once, the moment really is rather insignificant. In opposition to the great thinkers of Greece, now extinguished, there rises a remarkable new concept, and the desire for eternity, the promise of an endless existence free from sorrow, pain, or care possesses a very natural fascination for you mortals. This is what Christianity has to offer—on terms. If it knew as much about eternity as the gods, mankind might possibly pause upon this quest, for eternity is not by any means what it imagines. We Olympians understand otherwise. But meanwhile the usual thing is going to happen, for the new religion will prove, as every new religion proves, that the gods themselves are by no means immortal after all. Gods can only live upon the tombs of other

gods, and as we—myself and the rest—take our stations above the vanished divinities of the past, so now it is our turn to suffer eclipse in the morning glory of the new faith. There is an unwritten law that every generation of mankind will have the gods it deserves, and theology is simply a matter of education. For the next two thousand and one hundred years, Christianity will more or less suffice human needs, while man's present state of ignorance is slowly illuminated. After that the god idea must become more shadowy and amorphous until finally it evaporates altogether. Thinkers will continue, however, to make and display their own brain images of the gods for a long time, just as earlier man created theirs of wood and stone, ivory and gold. Moreover to speak of one God is vain, since every human heart capable of any noble concept holds its own image of deity, and no two are alike.

"There are curious things about the new religion," continued Pan. "Strenuous times are coming. The Emperor is already born who will murder those who cleave to the old gods,

and rivers of blood must drown, hurricanes of fire must consume, not merely Pagans, but countless Christians who do not see Christ with the eyes of authority. The Man of Sorrows he is rightly called, for in His Name sorrows unspeakable will come; in His glory mankind will develop a ferocity to shame the carnivora; huge armies of sanctified creatures will be let loose on earth brandishing the keys of Heaven and Hell; and, in a fine frenzy of religion, these earnest fellows will trample reason under their feet, spew upon philosophy and create a chasm in human progress—a long and agonising night lit by their own bale-fires —that shall endure until sickened and tormented man tears himself out of their clutches. And all will be done in the name of the Prince of Peace, the Spirit of Righteousness, the Father of Love—Three Gods in One and One in Three."

"What about liberty of conscience?" asked Arcadius blankly.

"His conscience will no longer be in anybody's keeping," answered Pan; "his fellow-

man, turned priest, will demand it from him on pain of everlasting damnation."

"My brother says, 'The Letter killeth.'"

"He is quite right: it will kill many hundreds of thousands. And it will kill thousands who merely differ about the Letter itself, seeing that the Letter of Christianity can never be determined so long as it endures. The thing itself is protean and takes varied forms, turning not a few of your Italian tutelary deities into its own saints and taming the theogonies of the Orient to its purpose. A babel of interpretation will swiftly smother its content of value. Yet Christianity has come into a civilisation that promised much. It inherits a great literature, a noble jurisprudence and a developing sense of social existence; but in five centuries the literature will only exist in fragments, the jurisprudence will sink to trial by ordeal and other fetich substitutes for law, and the dawning social science be forgot. In fact these tremendous fellows are going to make the world so undignified, dangerous and disgusting, that in self-

defence man must transfer his stricken hopes to another. That is their purpose: to kill earth and the joy thereof until man's days sink to no more than a bitter pilgrimage."

"Sultry times appear to be coming," said Arcadius. "But why should my wife join this difficult community?"

"She is safe. These things will not happen in her life," replied the God. "Christianity is still so near its fountains that the river of healing may flow harmlessly for her. She can live and die, not without sad visions, or awful questionings, yet safe in her own peace."

"I at least am yours," answered the young man. "And I hope you will last my time, Great Friend."

"Have no fear," promised Pan. "You may count upon me. Of all the gods I anticipate extinction with least concern. So long as I am in a human heart, I abide its questions. Of this more on another occasion. Now bid Ceres lift up her spirit and be a good and faithful Christian; and censure not Hilarion. As yet he knows happiness as the earth-worm

knows it, who has never seen the sunshine. Presently the sun will rise for him also, and we may catch the excellent lad blinking a little. All shall be well, for I forget not your twin brother. It is a trick of the gods to believe in many who do not believe in them."

With that the puck-nosed deity was gone, and in some amazement and confusion at all he had heard, Arcadius returned to his family.

With uneasy instinct he clutched his son to his bosom—surely the little one must ever love and worship Pan—but he spoke cheerfully to Ceres and declared that his god had no objection whatever to her ambitions.

"Be a Christian, my dear; and be a good one," he said. "Pan approves of your determination and thinks no worse of Hilarion for converting you. Don't, however, try to convert me, for that would be the height of ingratitude and might wake in my heart emotions I hope will never rise there."

"I shouldn't dream of such a thing, my dear husband," replied Ceres. "Pray for you

I must always ; and I shall pray for good Pan also."

" One prays to a god, not for him," replied Arcadius, and Ceres smiled and kissed him on both cheeks.

" You don't know what Christianity can do yet," she said.

" Pan apparently does, however," he responded.

## X

## *TRAGEDY*

ON the first of March were celebrated the Matronalia, the female Kalends, held in honour of those august women who put an end to the Sabine war. Now the ladies received a return for their own gifts at the Saturnalia of December, and it was the custom that their husbands, lovers and friends should bring handsome presents upon this festival.

Her spouse had given Ceres a necklace of emeralds and Hilarion also had promised her something, concerning which she felt curious, for what had Hilarion to give anybody? But the little matter of the Matronalia was not much in their thoughts, since a far greater event happened to be at hand.

Now Arcadius climbed to see his brother while the East wind's enchantment was over

all things. For Eurus is a rare painter and can do more with his pigments upon the naked sky than Zephyr, for all those peaks and pinnacles of cloud that he lifts from old ocean. The East Wind knows not the crystal clarity of rain-soaked air. He works with dry brushes and hides the horizon under magic colours, so that though earth curdle beneath his stroke, the woods ache through and through, the waters show their teeth, the cattle turn their shivering backs, yet aloft float fairy feathers and the hills lie under tender veils and gauzes. The tyrant loves to go in delicate raiment of azure, silver, rose, draped Orient-wise over his steely bosom ; his dagger leaps from a sheath of pearl and opal, and he smiles while he stabs.

Thus thought Arcadius as he drew a sheepskin about him and climbed upward through the mastic and lavender and myrtle scrub until he reached his brother's home. Hilarion was on his knees and he rose in some concern, for the visitor greeted him with such asperity of tone that he grew fearful. But there was no

need, and for once the voice of conscience happened to be mistaken. Only a nip of the East wind had touched Arcadius.

"Rise from your prayer and draw the curtain against this infernal blast," he said. "Excuse me for striking into your meditations; but there is a good reason."

"You do nothing without reason, brother," replied Hilarion, pulling the curtain and bringing a rug of wolf-skin for his pallet. "Wrap this about you. Shall I make a fire?"

"Yes," answered Arcadius, "make a fire by all means—not for me, but for tenderer souls who design to visit you presently. Ceres and her cousin, Erotion, ascend anon, that you may give my wife her promised gift. You look down in the mouth this morning. Another cold?"

"No," answered Hilarion rather sadly. "I am not cold enough. It is borne in upon me, brother, that my life falls short of what it should be. Day by day the conviction grows. I am uneasy and suffer from a bad conscience."

Arcadius showed interest.

"What is this Christian malady of a bad conscience?" he asked.

"I must go," answered Hilarion ignoring the question. "No, it is not the East wind. The wind is tonic, wholesome. It tells the truth to me in its trenchant and penetrating way. You bid me to draw the curtain, Arcadius, and I draw it. But that—I was going to say 'accursed'—curtain is a symbol of much more important things than itself."

At this moment the badgers emerged from their arcanum. They were immensely sleek, plump and prosperous.

"My husband ate too much pickled anchovy last night," explained the badger's wife placidly. "So we're just going out in the air a bit to pull him together."

They shuffled off and Hilarion's lustrous eyes regarded them sadly.

"I am like those poor brutes," he declared. "I am comfortable, prosperous, putting on weight at every meal. Instead of growing thinner, I grow fatter; instead of feeling my

flesh become more and more a vesture, from which I shall be glad to escape, I find myself hale and hearty and sound as a nut—not a weak spot, not an ache or pain. This is all wrong. One ought, physically, to go down the hill as, spiritually, one goes up it. Instead —well, look at me. I am more like you than ever—even harder and tougher than you."

Arcadius laughed.

"The result of a blameless life," he declared. "You can't have it both ways, dear brother. The average recluse generally looks on the wine when it is red, and gathers a few rosebuds where he may, ere he assumes the cord and cowl, and shaves his top-knot. He has laid in his rheumatism and sciatica before he started; but Nature is a plain dealer and eminently just. You must not expect to suffer, if you and your parents before you have done nothing to suffer for. That is where the Eternal Mother appears so much fairer than ourselves. Cheer up, however; and be sure there's a bad time coming."

Hilarion shook his head and repeated his

determination to depart and seek more arid circumstances and severer discipline.

Then his brother told him the great news.

"Pan has no quarrel with your recent activities," he announced. "I refer to Ceres. Of course I knew that you were trying to make her a Christian with all your might; and now you have succeeded. She is a Christian down to her toes, and I hope good may come of it."

"Pan doesn't mind!" exclaimed Hilarion.

"Not in the least. Believe in my god or no, this you must own: that he is large-minded, tolerant and generous to all created things."

Hilarion, however, felt a little suspicious.

"There's no catch in this?" he asked.

"None—unless it be for Ceres. I hope Christianity will prove a great catch in every way for her. I rejoice to see her happy, and she is gloriously happy as a result of my agreement with her desires."

"It is like yourself to take this exalted line," murmured Hilarion in some emotion. "You

will never forget it, dear brother. By their light ye shall know them. Ceres will go from strength to strength."

"She couldn't be a better woman than she is," declared Arcadius. "A good wife and a good house-wife, a perfect mother, charitable to the needy, sympathetic to the weak and patient with the pig-headed—a noble character in fact. I have never seen such another."

"She will rise to still greater heights," prophesied Hilarion. "You have done me much good, banished idle fears, heartened me to wrestle with my own doubts and difficulties. My gift for Ceres was my most treasured missal—the Epistle of our St. James. But I did not intend to give it her until I had asked your permission."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Arcadius. "Give her anything but that death's head. And if you would permit this relic of a man who has breathed and lived and hoped and desired happiness as much as we do—if you would allow that fragment of what was once one of us, and therefore worthy of decent

burial, to return to earth, I should regard it as a favour. Christianity is overdoing this rag and bone business."

Thus one by one Hilarion's little comforts slipped away from him. Under the circumstances and at such a moment it had been churlish to deny his brother's request. And yet the skull was more than a mere skull to him. He entertained a real friendship for the relic: the withered bone had received many confidences and become in some sort his familiar. Now, however, he did not hesitate.

"You are right," he admitted. "You have a clean, Roman way of regarding things, and much that a monk takes for granted may, perhaps, admit of question. With all its errors Paganism never traded in hairs from the head of Jupiter, or parings from Aphrodite's finger-nail. But think not that Christianity is less logical and pure-minded than any other creed. Charity is our watchword and humility our countersign. I will bury my skull, and I wish it were possible to take it back to the Egyptian desert whereon I found it, that its ultimate

reunion with fellow-fragments might be more readily effected when the coming Trump shall sound. These details, however, may be safely left to the Creator of us all. I will inter this emblem of mortality under the crocuses and utter a becoming prayer."

"Do," said his twin brother.

They parted with utmost affection and, later in the day, slaves brought up a litter from which emerged Ceres and her cousin, Erotion. The latter was but seventeen and exquisitely beautiful. Princes had desired to wed this girl, yet a certain trait, common to the maidens of her race, distinguished her. She was seriously minded, entertained no great regard for man and desired goodness rather than experience. This ideal at seventeen, manifested in one with violet eyes, hair like autumn gold and a lovely face, after the impassive perfection of the Greek, was matter for amazement. Her parents —worldly people—held Erotion to be a changeling; but Ceres adored her, saw her own opinions and ideals reflected in the beautiful child and hoped for her a future of intellectual

distinction akin to the learned females of Attic renown, yet innocent of certain undesirable features recorded concerning them.

And now, joyous above measure in her newly found liberty to join Hilarion on the plane of his religion, Ceres already began to see in Erotion another convert. Converted she must be without delay, and who more likely to accomplish the task than the brother of Arcadius? Indeed not a shadow clouded this ambition. The cousin of Ceres had already harkened to the new teachers and declined to go with her parents to the cosy temple of Vesta by Tiber, where the little they did in this line was done. Erotion possessed the Christian virtues as a precious gift from Providence, and it remained only for her to learn the beauty, mystery and pathos of Hilarion's glorious evangel to receive it with gratitude if not passion.

Ceres was right. Erotion perceived the joy which now irradiated the countenance of her cousin and, indeed, as they sat together in the litter covered with the skins of tiger and bear, the Christian girl had already lighted the first

spark of a flame that her brother-in-law would quickly kindle to a blaze.

They joined him presently and he blessed Ceres and welcomed her to the bosom of the Church. He was full of plans for her formal reception, and then he turned to her cousin and from his heart spoke comfortable and eloquent words.

Erotion struck without a struggle, for Hilarion excelled himself. The badgers, after their little airing, sneaked back to their establishment utterly unobserved before the enthralling splendour of his exposition.

To be plain, Erotion was converted in five minutes; then they discussed worldly things and how Marcus Severus Pomponius was prospering with his teeth.

Hilarion blessed them both, and they promised to see him again on the following Wednesday; but twenty-four hours later, Erotion, with that stark absence of any coquetry which marked her character, came up again quite alone and enjoyed another long conversation on her own account.

To Hilarion it seemed not twenty-four hours, but twenty-four years since he had seen her. She brought him some difficulties and he solved them ; she put to him a number of intelligent questions and he answered them. At last both sank into silence and merely sat humbly looking into each other's eyes. They were two pairs of the most beautiful eyes in Italy, and each thought the other pair the loveliest things that life had ever revealed.

Erotion rose to depart, and Hilarion went half a mile out of bounds to see her on the path. He was suddenly alarmed for her, that a rude beast might accost her, or a stone slip under her delicate feet. Indeed he would not let her go until a peasant passed that way and was directed to escort her back to the villa.

She came again with Ceres, with Arcadius, by herself ; and he liked best the visits when she approached him unattended.

Familiar phenomena now overgot Hilarion. He found himself on several occasions sighing to the moon, who, as she swam into the unclouded sky, was as white as the shoulder of

Erotion. That came out of Horace—an unbeliever. He remembered something else in Horace—a poet who had given him pleasure in the past on the lips of a literate though earthy monk. "Soften life's crosses with a smile, for there's nothing happy on every side." Yet what were these emotions—not happy certainly, but ineffable, precious, yearning—moony? And what the mischief had he to do with the pagan moon, or the moon with him?

Spring was now in the air. Life sought its mate. Even the badgers were giggling and talking nonsense to each other. Every bird carried a twig, or a wisp of wool from the thorny sheep-track; the young devotees came in couples—boy and girl together—and looked more at each other than at him. He missed his skull and was in a mind to dig it up again. Perhaps it might help him to banish this phantom in a crocus-coloured gown, with violet eyes and a voice like the wood doves. The brook, whence he drew his weekly carp, murmured one word monotonously; and whereas it had

been wont to sing inspiriting early Christian canticles, now the crystal could babble but a single, blessed name. "Erotion"—"Erotion" it throbbed, and the lark on high tinkled "Erotion"; the nightingale cried her at twilight; and even the raven croaked of her as he flew heavily high overhead. The spring flowers also wrote "Erotion" upon the herbage, and by night the galaxies of heaven spelled her name across the sky.

Hilarion wrestled with this unparalleled experience and certainly did grow thinner; but he could not banish the maiden from his mind, and since he had ever been a man of austere principles who never looked twice at, or thought twice about a girl, the flame of this arrow, sped through his monkish habit by Cupid, burned with a mordant intensity that confounded him.

When Erotion came for more Light, his knees turned to water, and while she could not fail to perceive his increasing pallor, for his part he observed that a new loveliness sat upon her countenance. She told him one day, in

faltering words, that her visit to Ceres was about to end.

"Don't go—don't go," he said, and marvelled what strange voice spoke within him.

"I don't want to; but there is nothing to keep me longer. It will be better—wiser to return home," she answered.

He saw her to the very gates of the villa, exacted a promise that she would come once again before she departed, and so far forgot himself as to kneel and kiss the hem of her robe.

Then he tottered back to his cave, and reaching it, fell trembling upon the silver sand of the floor. He had at last found out what was the matter and now voiced his awful discovery in hollow accents that echoed in despair among the crannies of the grotto.

"Good God—I'm in love!" cried the dumbfoundered hermit; and he devoted all that night to devising penitential exercises.

## XI

## *A COMPACT*

MANY moons waxed and waned before Hilarion heard more of his family or indeed saw a soul from the Pomponian villa. He began to be seriously concerned, therefore, and after the first long-drawn pang, suffered when Erotion came not to say "farewell," as she had promised, her memory settled as a dead weight upon his heart and he only roused himself with painful effort to minister to his devotees as usual. But concerning his brother also, no direct word reached him, though the absence of Arcadius was in a measure explained. For there came evil news of the State. Gratian had fallen far below his early omens and the monarch now grew into a reproach rather than a promise. He even condescended to appear publicly in the uncouth fur garments of a Scythian savage, and

his love for the chase first brought shame, then scorn to his legions. Murmurs thrilled the ranks of the Western armies, and presently a man renowned in war, one Maximus, a Spaniard, was lifted to the purple and invited to accept the Empire by a soldiery ignorant of his true qualities. Thus the rude isle of Britain saw a Roman emperor accept his destiny ; and not only did the might of that island support Maximus, but all Gaul quickly received his sovereignty. Gratian, making war at the time against wild animals in the neighbourhood of Paris, quickly fled to the South ; but his course was stayed at Lyons, and before he could summon the forces of Italy against the usurper, he perished under a treacherous sword.

Maximus, not content with a share of empire, now aimed at Italy ; and in his turn he fell, for Theodosius, the Emperor of the East, proved faithful to the family of Gratian. Nigh Aquilea perished the upstart, Maximus, and with him fell his son ; but the generosity of a Christian conqueror supported the traitor's

aged mother and orphan daughters. Thus goodness and evil are mixed in the chalice that holds a great man. The first Valentinian had illustrated this rule, and Theodosius, who abounded in the highest virtues and could pardon the citizens of Antioch their crimes, yet inhumanly massacred the Thessalonians. There is ever an ingredient in princes that escapes historian or biographer; but which, denied us, renders reconciliation of their contradictions impossible.

Now the second Valentinian reigned in Gratian's stead, and Arcadius had secretly hoped that the new monarch might annul various edicts of his dead brother and return to the Pagan priesthood certain valued allowances and privileges of late taken away from them. But he reckoned without the Christian hierarchy, daily growing more powerful. The Churchman Ambrose, now towered upon the shining horizons of the new Faith, and a mind capable of influencing the mighty Theodosius, swiftly dominated the amiable and pious lad who for a moment ruled Italy. The old gods

were being routed on every hand and their temples closed or opened anew in the name of Christ.

Gloomed by these things, which had only reached Hilarion fitfully from the mouths of peasants, Arcadius remembered his brother, and upon a sad-coloured day of mist and silence he climbed the hills and appeared before the cavern.

"I have done ill to be absent so long," he said, "but you were seldom out of my thoughts though affairs and tribulations have kept me from you. They were not always such that I could expect you to share my sorrow."

Hilarion embraced his brother.

"All is well with Ceres and the boy?"

"All is quite well with them."

"And—and Erotion, your kinswoman?"

"We will speak of her anon. For the moment cheer me, as you can. What says Marcus? I do not mean our revered parent, but the Antonine. 'Enter into every man's Inner Self,' he urges, 'and let every man enter into thine.' But how many portals

worth entering will grant an entrance, and at how many does not the knocker fright us from the door? With you and me, however, that is not so. We are one."

"Of late that thought has been my only consolation," replied Hilarion.

"I should like to believe that the miseries of the times are weighing upon you as they weigh upon me," continued his brother; "but your part, no doubt, continues to be a frozen abstraction, removed above the tribulations of your kind."

"For the moment I have sorrows enough of my own," confessed the hermit, and Arcadius eyed him curiously. The survey convinced Hilarion's brother that something was indeed amiss. The solitary had grown very thin, and the only bright thing about him was his eyes. He looked pale, untidy, unfit, unhappy.

"You are ill, brother. You have been overdoing it. I curse myself that I have not been looking after you more closely," cried Arcadius; but Hilarion shook his head.

"If I am slightly emaciated and less comely,

that is to the good," he answered. "I have nothing to grumble at in reality but my own faulty nature. Tell me about yourself."

"I find that as the mind develops," answered Arcadius, "the hope of happiness grows fainter. That is a melancholy discovery, and everybody has got to make it, be he monk or country gentleman. My old ideals fade. I must plan my future days and ambitions upon a new foundation."

"Our minds are moving—that is in itself a hopeful fact," replied his brother, but without conviction.

"The sum is well stated by rare Juvenal," answered Arcadius. "For what says he? 'Pray for a sound mind in a sound body, for a good finish, not a doubtful continuation,' which is to say not an eternal becoming as the metaphysicians propose, but a glorious being, such as flesh and blood rightly demands. So many of you Christians do nothing but look forward, and miss the journey of life itself by consequence. 'Fear not death,' adds the poet, 'but when it comes, recognise it for the last

though not the least of Nature's blessings.' He is spiritual and exalted in his sentiments. He would have us choose the labours of Hercules rather than those of Venus and, before all, seek peace through virtue, wherein alone it shall be found. Nothing about happiness, mark you ; yet for a man who follows this direction, Fortune is no goddess. He stands alike indifferent to her promise of friendship, or her threat of enmity."

Hilarion sighed.

" It is all very well for you, who have a good and beautiful wife and a noble son, to turn up your nose at Venus," he answered. " It is easy to despise what we possess and pretend our treasures are of little worth ; but what did we feel about them before we won them ? This : that they represented all things vital to content, happiness and life itself ? "

Arcadius stared ; then a sunshine of delight broke over his face and transformed it.

" You're in love ! How human, how refreshing ! How close it brings us ! This is indeed blessed news."

" ' Blessed news ' you call it," answered the other in hollow accents. " You have imagination—you read the poets—then try to conceive what this must mean to me. I am in love, as you say ; and could a more appalling, unexpected and shattering event have crashed into the serenity and fancied security of my unfortunate existence ? "

" Great Gods ! You talk as though it were a crime to fall in love, brother."

" For me it was. Such a thing ought to have been utterly impossible to one armed as I am, fixed as I have ever been on the celibate ideal and its implications."

" Doesn't this prove the celibate ideal a myth ? "

" Far from it ; nothing is proved save my own pride and abominable self-assurance. I always knew too well that I was a sinner, but never feared to fall into such a trap as this."

" What have you done, after all ? " inquired his brother.

" Nothing particularly grievous until now," confessed Hilarion. " But I had my full share

of the old Adam, of course, like the best and worst of us, and I should have looked far more sharply after it and not felt so insanely confident."

"Men are born babes, not sinners," replied Arcadius, "and to talk of 'original sin' is to talk nonsense, as I have already told you. Your sin, if I may say so, Hilarion, is not to fall in love with a high-minded and noble girl, but to have fallen in love with yourself. That is the trouble with you, as it was with Narcissus. Your sin—I hate the word—lies in evading a brave man's destiny, his battle with life, his duty to his neighbour. I'm not preaching, because of late I find myself committing the same grave errors. You and I are making a similar mistake in opposite ways. This is only to show that our natures are one, though our religions are two. Your fault, dear brother, lies in the things you are doing to ensure your own salvation. You seek to intimidate and impress the people with your righteousness; but your devotees are far more useful than yourself. They carry on the world's work, not

you—just as my slaves are justifying their existence, not I. The least of these is more valuable than Hilarion, or Arcadius. To be busy about nothing but your own little soul is in my opinion to argue a soul barely worth saving. Does your personal discomfort in this den bring anybody else nearer your God, even if it brings you nearer? Does your present life beget a ray of happiness for any created creature but the badgers? Emphatically, no. Therefore accept this warning and amend your days, even as I design to amend my own."

"You know nothing at all," replied Hilarion and argued a little tactlessly, seeing that he was talking to a married man.

"We can leave me out of the question," he began; "and whether my vocation is good, or no. One must judge for oneself about that. But we are for the moment confronted with the fact that I am in love. My Church already finds the sex question to bristle with difficulties. Christianity may soon be deploring the fact that there should be such things as women at all. The Fathers deprecate their

existence very definitely. But certain problems are already solved, and we now know that only the Almighty's plan for perpetuating the race justifies marriage. It follows that we endure the institution and propose to elevate it into a sacrament and something much more respectable than, at present, we find it. But wedded Christians, by the nature of things, cannot vie with the single in selfless devotion to what alone matters; nor can they fairly hope to enjoy a solitary's share of the ultimate, heavenly reward. This is self-evident justice."

Arcadius stared, then he sighed.

"Oh, Constantine, Constantine!" he cried, "your conversion has ruined the world and delivered it, chained and bound, to a most tragical error. But 'conversion' will not much longer be the word, for if those in power think thus, 'conversion' will soon spell 'compulsion.' Is Christianity going to end this world while showing us the way to the next?"

Then he returned to Hilarion.

"You are at the parting of the roads," he said, "and your next step may mar a valuable

man and end a beautiful life. Surely no creed would smile on such a catastrophe?"

"What man? What life?" inquired the hermit. "I mar no man and threaten no life. All I have ever demanded are the best possible conditions for communion with my Maker and advancement of my soul."

"And yet I speak the truth. Others can fall in love as well as you. The man you will wreck is yourself; the beautiful existence you will assuredly terminate belongs, at present precariously, to my wife's cousin, Erotion."

His brother turned pale.

"What evil has befallen her?" he asked.

"She has had the doubtful fortune to love also," replied Arcadius, "and it remains to be seen whether she loves a man or the selfish shadow of a man. Love has come to her as the whirlwind to the threshing-floor. She is swept away upon it, and if nothing happens to temper her tragic suffering, she will soon perish."

"She loves me!" gasped Hilarion.

"Why not? Cupid is no respecter of persons, yet can be exceedingly intelligent and

gracious when in a pleasant mood. Take my own case. Was there ever a couple better matched, more one at heart, more perfectly suited each to the other than Ceres and I? It is true that you have just doomed us to a lower table at your celestial banquet, where, beneath the salt, we shall see you reclining among the few honest bachelors; but she and I shall be together; and that very possibly may be quite heaven enough for us."

"Don't think I meant anything personal," stammered Hilarion.

"No, no; you will still be my dear, twin brother. But I spoke of Cupid and declared that he will often make a kindly shot and bag a brace well suited to each other. And I assert that my wife's cousin would have made you a magnificent wife, while you must have been the perfect spouse for such a serious-minded and earnest maiden. Instead, what is going to happen? You are floored by reality and will henceforth be mighty little use to God, or man, so far as I can see; and as for Erotion she will die. She is in the doctor's hands at

this moment, and Rufus knows perfectly well what's the matter with her, though he calls it by another name in the usual, silly, professional manner."

"This is awful news," murmured Hilarion. He sat, a monument of despair, staring before him into the eye of the East wind with his hands in his beard and his cowl fallen back upon his broad shoulders.

"I was not going to tell you the sad truth about her," explained Arcadius, "for if, as I imagined, you had not thought of her again, it had only been to harrow you to relate her sufferings, though you were the cause of them. A man cannot be asked to wed a maiden because she desires him to do so; but since you are also perfectly and completely in love with her, surely there ought to be hope for you both? The world must go on, whatever you say, and if——"

"Peace! Peace!" cried Hilarion. "Would you have me behold in the guise of my brother, the Tempter of mankind—the Arch-Enemy—the Master of the Pit?"

"Nothing is gained by calling me names," answered Arcadius, "and who the Master of the Pit may be I have yet to learn. Keep your nerve and be self-possessed. It was time you knew these things, for to destroy a fellow-creature whom you love appears to me an action that neither good Christian nor Pagan would smile upon. Consider your dilemma. You decline to wed Erotion. Why? That your soul may win the highest place. But, seeing that Erotion will most certainly sink into the earth if you do not marry her, what price are you going to pay for your saintship? Embarrassing, is it not?"

"Appalling," admitted Hilarion.

"I venture to think," continued Arcadius, "that your halo would be a trifle tarnished under any such distressing circumstances; and, after all, it is quite a question whether eternity, even with a halo, might be as refreshing as the same lengthy period spent beside a dear and loving wife. A halo as an everlasting companion is a bleak thought. Again—you don't know all there is to know. You and your party

may be hopelessly wrong about marriage putting a man out of the hunt for saintship. You must admit that a clever woman helps one forward, and even a good woman may do the same. They are seldom both clever and good, as in the case of Ceres, but you can't have everything, and there is no doubt that Erotion, who is a Christian now and was a perfect character before, would do much to help you on your way and nothing to hinder. You have seen what a tower of strength to each other man and wife occasionally can be ; why, then, should you suppose that two perfectly mated people must mutually hinder on the road to your heaven? How much more likely that united they may attain to a higher reward than either alone. For at least such a couple have stood up to life ; and why you should be more handsomely rewarded for running away from it I fail to appreciate."

"You don't grasp the point," answered Hilarion hopelessly.

"Yes I do," replied Arcadius, "because I have experience and estimate the value of what

I tell you. I am twice as good a man as I was before I married Ceres, and I mean to be twice and four times as good at no distant date. With a wife like mine and such a god as Pan, I ought to blush for myself, for I am not worthy of either. But ere long I hope to be. There are great ideas moving in my mind—Pan has doubtless put them there. They don't involve running away from my wife and family, however. Ceres had a daughter six weeks ago. All is well, and we are going to call her Pomona Maria, after the goddess of fruit trees and the gracious human Mother of your Man-God."

"I am very glad," replied Hilarion. "Let her be a Christian, dear brother."

"She shall be exactly what she wishes to be," replied Arcadius. "My only care is to see the young fountain of her mind spring pure from its pure sources. To poison wells is an evil deed, but venial to poisoning youthful minds. You Christians promise all manner of things for your infants—a great and futile profanity if you look at it justly,

for who can promise for another? Have I convinced you?"

"Far from it," declared Hilarion. "I view with the utmost uneasiness your arguments—so to call them. I mean, of course, regarding Erotion."

"Well then, hear a wiser than I. Let Pan have a chat with you."

Hilarion flushed.

"Be careful of what you are saying," he answered stiffly. "You know that I don't believe in Pan."

"Why not? I believe in your God—in all three of them. After all, the proof of the god lies in his worshippers. Few other proofs are ever offered. You must believe in Pan, if for no other reason than that I believe in him. He is a restful, a kindly, a wise deity, and it cannot hurt you to listen to him. He may agree with you—I have no idea of the opinion he will deign to express."

"Hurt me he certainly cannot," answered Hilarion. "There is nothing that can pierce my armour but my own weakness."

"Then let him speak. He was willing that Ceres should become a Christian, recollect. There is nothing paltry about him. He is, in fact, a god, though he may be but a shadow from your point of view. Truth cannot contradict truth, and who knows that what my god says to-day, your God may affirm to-morrow? Let that be the test. If Pan advises after such wisdom that your heavenly Counsellor contradicts him, I will say no more; but should my god say 'do thus and thus,' and your own Director offer you like advice, then, surely, it will be impossible for you to remain longer in doubt of your duty—both to god and woman?"

"You suggest a most irregular course," replied his brother, "for what shall any god, in whom I do not believe, have to say to me that can matter to me? I will, however, for the love I bear you——"

"And Erotion."

"For the love I bear to all my fellow-creatures, and out of a great desire to do the right thing, I consent to this unusual ex-

pedient. I warn you, however, that though he speak with the tongue of angels, I shall severely discount his suggestions and submit each and all to a higher authority."

"It's a bargain," agreed Arcadius. "Of course," he added, "I cannot speak for my god. He may not believe in you any more than you believe in him; but I feel fairly sanguine. Many bear the thyrsus who do not know the god, and many know the god who do not bear the thyrsus. I mean that you may find Pan something far nearer to your heart than you imagine; and he loves you, whether you will or no, for he told me so."

"I shall be true to my principles," replied Hilarion, "but meantime keep me not in suspense. My heart is breaking for that sick girl. Leave me now, best of kind brothers, for I would pray for her."

"Do so—we will leave no stone unturned to save her," promised Arcadius.

Then he kissed his haggard twin and descended the mountain feeling exceedingly sanguine.

"We weave our own garlands round the eternal gods," he thought, "until often, struggle as they may, they cannot show us their divine faces for what we have hung and heaped upon them."

## XII

### *SUSPENSE*

ON still days, when the wind is resting and the sky clouded, yet not so heavily curtained but the place of the sun may be seen ; on days at the edge of autumn, when the flame and pomp of the fading year cease their challenge for a while, there is born into the spirit of man a pensive mood that does not deepen into sadness, but rather exalts than casts down. It springs of the diurnal monotone, spreads placidly through thought, as the grey mist upon the meadow, and is welcome. It comes in temperate guise and flings never a sharp shadow to heighten the splendour of great lights ; it brings no inspiration, but rather, like the weather, dims and softens, leaving the mind restrained, receptive, pervious to sensation. Other days dominate, awake emotion and demand reaction ; while

these still, ash-coloured hours take the spirit by stealth and their quality wins us to a brooding patience before the spectacle of life.

On such a day and in such a humour Arcadius ascended again to see his brother. Some months had passed by since last he visited the cavern, and Pan was still silent. No response had come to his petition, yet the young man persisted in it and his soul did not faint. There was a measure of good news for Hilarion, as well as the frosty intelligence that his brother's god as yet had given no sign.

Now, climbing upward, it happened that Arcadius fell in with the serpent—she whom he had seen in the splendour of her new robe many years before.

"And how is it with you?" he asked.

"Much as usual," replied she. "I go on my peaceful way and think my thoughts."

"Still moralising at the vision of existence vouchsafed to your ladyship?"

"Certainly. To moralise becomes me and can do no other created thing harm. For example, on beholding this crab tree, with its

sparkling harvest of gold and crimson fruit cast down upon the sward for those to eat who will, an idea occurred to me."

"Nobody wants a crab-apple," replied the other.

"True. Yet here and there you see a mouse has broken through in hope of seeds—then abandoned its disagreeable task. Many crabby creatures have valuable seeds in them, Arcadius, but life is too short for the painful business of extraction. So such sour folk are left to wonder, what it is that denies them the attention their sweeter and perhaps less nourishing neighbours win so readily. They are conscious of their excellent seeds; quite unconscious of the sour pulp in which they are packed away."

"Excellent," admitted Arcadius. "Now I go to another moraliser—the hermit, Hilarion."

A cold spark glinted in the serpent's eye.

"Not long since, while he taught the peasants, I too listened and was a good deal upset," she said. "I crept away unseen and have been perturbed ever since."

"Impossible," declared Arcadius. "He is

made of mercy and would not hurt a living thing."

"We serpents," continued the lady, "have ever been held in honour for wisdom and other qualities that man appreciates, but too often lacks. The snake is also the symbol of prophecy and of youth renewed. In the form of a serpent came Æsculapius from Epidaurus, as it was written in the Sibelline books. Within the temples of the God of Healing we are preserved and cherished; our record is without a stain; we have justly won reputation and the respect of gods and men. Yet what is this that Hilarion tells the people? A very different story—an outrage—a libel on my race!"

"The Garden of Eden and so on—yes, I remember," replied Arcadius. "Rather painful for you to hear, no doubt."

"Exceedingly painful and exceedingly improper," grumbled the serpent. "From saviours, we are come to be destroyers—tempters—cunning rascals—the villains of the human drama. It ought not to be allowed—in fact something must be done about it."

"Forget it," advised Arcadius.

"Of course we well know that listeners never hear any good of themselves," admitted the snake, "and this is a lesson to me not to lend an ear to any of your doubtful race in future; but one thing I will say: that if you are going to scorn the serpent, you will quarrel with Æsculapius and henceforward sacrifice to him in vain. When Hilarion has aches and pains he may whistle for the god—and Hygieia too."

"We shall all be whistling for the gods pretty soon," answered Arcadius. "My own opinion is that every generation gets the gods it deserves, and that the Olympians have deserted us in a body. For look at our unhappy State—the tribulation on every hand—another emperor murdered and Nemesis doubtless waiting for us at every turn."

"You must expect disaster," replied she. "This comes from cleaving to new deities and cold-shouldering your faithful old supporters, from insulting respectable people, like myself, who have had no small share in your welfare,

and from forgetting your obligations generally."

She glided indignantly away and the man climbed on.

It was true that another monarch had fallen and the young and harmless brother of Gratian gone to join that monarch in the shades. It seemed that the purple must ever be dyed with blood, and civil wars too swiftly dismember the Roman Empire. Arcadius had not the least ambition to take up arms himself; but, like the serpent, strongly felt that something must be done about it. Now he only waited for Pan's guidance to enter upon a more masculine life, and play what part the god might order in this hour of the nation's need.

He now appeared before Hilarion and felt pained to observe how emaciated and miserable his twin brother had become.

"Welcome," he said. "I have good and bad news, and I will give you the bad news first. Pan has made no sign in answer to my prayers and sacrifices; but we must of course wait his good pleasure and his hour. I have

not, so far as I can judge, done anything to cause him anger, or to turn him from me; therefore hope, as I do. And Erotion—well, Erotion is a little better."

"Thank God for that," replied his brother; and so deeply was he moved that he wept. Arcadius supported him with good cheer; but concerning the improvement in the girl's condition, concealed the reason for this happy circumstance. For that Ceres had to be thanked. She did not hesitate, on learning the great fact how Hilarion loved Erotion, to inform her cousin that the recluse was in like case with herself; and the joy of hearing that her passion was returned proved so precious for the sufferer that, even though nothing as yet promised to come of it, the mere information comforted her more than tonics or change of air.

Ceres had indeed breathed hope, and her feminine intuition spied happiness in the future for the distracted couple. It appeared so emphatically a case for Providence, and Providence had played Ceres so fair since she

became a Christian, that the wife of Arcadius set her faith in that high principle and trusted the future to it.

Her brother-in-law now asked after Ceres and Pomona Maria. He then explained that his own duty still appeared doubtful to him. He could not feel positive on the point, but was inclined to fear marriage must be an impossibility and that fate meant to solve the problem abruptly.

"I am very weak and ill," he explained, "and I incline to the opinion that I am going to die; but whether as a reward, or punishment, I feel uncertain."

Arcadius protested against any such fear, and Hilarion proceeded in a melancholy mood. He declared himself more of a miserable sinner than ever, and disparaged his existence so morbidly that the other became angered.

"This attitude is abominable," cried Arcadius, "and very soon I shall begin to hate a Church that takes such a preposterous view of the good world into which man is born. Not so the vanishing faith. You may laugh at us—

we are about the only thing you do laugh at—and you may find the ancient cult absurd and outgrown ; but heathenism, as you are pleased to call it, has many redeeming qualities. It is at least jubilant, good-humoured, high-spirited, tolerant and charitable. Among our solemnities we dance and sing, we feast and rejoice. Our hierarchy are human, and the better do they understand us for that reason. Never an augur debating the doubtful entrails of a sacrifice is steeped in such gloom or utters such woeful prophecies as your least deacon. You defeat your own object and confound your own world-wide ambitions, for how shall a faith that breathes eternal damnation ever grip the human heart—except with terror ? "

" To exchange falsehood for truth is always alarming," replied Hilarion, " and all great changes, whether social or religious, must upset our lives and cause a varying measure of discomfort, if not actual suffering. Man is not easily wrenched from his matrix of custom. And in custom, in habits, in traditions, all deeply rooted through generations upon our

hearts and minds, we find that unfortunate link which completes what at first sight appears to be a vicious circle. It is a misfortune that belongs to the nature of things, and I have not discovered, even in my own sublime religion, any evidence that it can be banished."

"I see your point," replied his twin brother; "for while custom holds upon her steady course and while tradition offers us that breadth of vision which we cannot enjoy without it, yet, in our natural instinct to lean upon the past, there must always be a stubborn obstacle to progress."

"Yes," agreed Hilarion. "The static is ever the enemy of the dynamic, and man in the lump will continue to think that what was good enough and safe enough for his fathers is good enough and safe enough for him. Hence the hard and ugly death of accepted things and vested interests, religions among the rest."

"Faced with this obdurate and unyielding dilemma, then, man can never reach any millennium, though it is to his credit that he is

always trying," replied Arcadius, "for progress must mean misery for somebody. Indeed it invariably does. The wheel cannot turn upon the road without destroying harmless and contented creatures. In fact somebody's dog is always being run over; and the chariots of Christianity drive so furiously that the victims will soon be numerous. Granted for argument's sake that it is good; even so the road is strewn with many sufferers; and what most gives the Pagans pause is this: the increasing numbers of your own faith who appear among your victims. You do not agree among yourselves and you do not agree to differ among yourselves. Heresy and schism keep you even busier than propaganda and conversion. The Arians are down; but what of the others?"

"One must have inconveniences and differences of opinion at first," replied Hilarion. "We are merely cutting our teeth at present and, of course, want something to cut them on. Controversy and competition are a sign of life and health. There is no doubt that

Rome will set the final standards, become paramount, and exercise universal authority over the souls of men."

"Pan was right, however, as he always is," declared Arcadius, "and religion, like life itself, must submit to the law of change and breed its own sorrow, even in the heart of its own success. Change is the unalterable and everlasting pronouncement, and change means suffering to all sensible life, destruction for every human institution and heavenly star."

They sank into a gloomy silence; but it was swiftly broken by the shuffle of heavy feet and the huge form of "Innocence," the bear, darkened the mouth of the cavern.

Hilarion did not feel fear, for he was long past any such emotion; nor did he experience great surprise when his brother accosted the bear in its own vernacular.

"Welcome, old friend!" laughed Arcadius, as the brute rose on its hind legs and gave him a gentle hug of greeting; "this is indeed an honour! I never thought to receive you as a guest."

But the visitor did not immediately reply. He was much out of breath and panted for some time with his head down and his great tongue lolling out of his mouth.

Hilarion, perceiving that this bear was known favourably to his brother, fetched the beast a game pie, which he had not himself had the heart to open. It was gone in a moment, and the bear, much refreshed, delivered his message.

"I come from Pan," he said. "I may mention in passing that I have myself returned to Pan, and am now his servant and steadfast follower. I do things that he does not like—for example my attitude to flocks and herds differs vitally from his own; but I have entirely given up devouring malefactors at his express command, and even a god can't have it both ways, as he well knows."

"To business," interrupted Arcadius. "It is a great joy to see you here and a still greater joy to know whence you come. The god has a message. I have long expected it."

"He bids you and your brother attend him on this spot at evening time three days hence,"

proceeded "Innocence," "and he made a point of the fact that, as his trusted messenger, I must be well rewarded."

"Stop here," begged Arcadius. "Spend a week, or a fortnight, with me among these hills and enjoy yourself. If it is clearly understood you have ceased to devour the human race —malefactors and otherwise—you are welcome and may trust me for good and varied hunting. This is the monk, Hilarion, a holy man who wishes you nothing but well, and is as grateful to you for your message as I myself."

"I may stop here altogether for that matter," replied "Innocence." "I am weary of the Alban—not that I have worn-out my welcome, for I never had any. But these Sabine ranges offer promise, and such a cavern as this would suit me well enough. I'm not as young as I was, unfortunately. Good arbutus berries ripening overhead I note. And how is Valentinian?"

"Your Valentinian is dead long ago," answered Arcadius, and the great bear was astonished.

"And what did he die of?" asked "Innocence."

"Of his own temper," explained Arcadius, and the bear showed still greater surprise.

"Most unusual," he said. "It was generally the other people who died of his temper."

He went down the hill with his host presently and, indeed, slept and dined at the villa. But he left his sleeping quarters, in an empty stable, before daylight, so far forgot his manners as to eat a calf that belonged to a freed man, and then proceeded to explore the possibilities of his new home.

Arcadius, before he slept, returned to Hilarion and heartened him, warming his spirit in cheerful talk concerning Erotion, and his body with a great flask of soup, wherein white wine had been poured.

"Pan," he said, "has an art to eliminate from a human life the things that do not matter; and I have been astonished to find, when this is done, how little remains. The vital subjects—how few! It is the same with the history of the world. We fasten on showy

detail and find that we have missed the simple springs of movement, the foundation-stone that supports all. You will hear nothing to cause you any inconvenience, for Pan is a god apart; his worship breeds no jealousy in the souls of the deities, let them be as jealous of each other as they will."

"I am not afraid," answered Hilarion, "and only the issue will reveal whether I have done rightly or wrongly to heed this immortal being."

"At any rate do not fret about dying until you learn whether it is worth while to live," urged his devoted brother.

## XIII

### *THE WAY OUT*

ON the eventful day, Erotion was borne to the Pomponian villa, that she might hear if any hopeful word could be spoken by the god of Arcadius. She had much doubted, with Ceres and Hilarion himself, whether they deserved to be sanguine—whether, indeed, such a step as Arcadius now designed did not partake of divination, or even sorcery—a deadly sin. But, seeing that the husband of Ceres had ever been a faithful disciple of the Pasturer, and feeling as many early Christians felt that this deity stood in a measure apart, they cheered each other as best they might and hoped at least no harm would befall them.

"If we are mistaken," said Ceres gently, "it is certain that our own heavenly Mentors will soon make our error clear."

At the Pomponian villa the cousins waited hand-in-hand—Erotion upon her couch, for she was still very sick, and Ceres beside her. They spoke on various subjects to distract their thoughts, but ever, as the night advanced, returned to Hilarion and Arcadius.

The lover of the hermit felt least hopeful; yet, when she feared some dire rebuke might fall upon Hilarion's head for thus tampering with a false god, Ceres reminded her that Pan was at any rate old and wise, Hilarion still young and exceedingly inexperienced.

"After all, countless thousands of good men and women have died firmly believing in Pan," she said, "and in many other gods and goddesses also who were far less satisfactory than he. I have often heard my husband relate this deity's opinions, and whatever our Guides may think of Pan, he certainly has no quarrel with Them."

So they talked, and when darkness hung heavy on the land and a candle told that it was two o'clock, their ears began to strain for the footfall of Arcadius.

" He cannot be much longer now," declared Ceres. In her heart was a suspicion that not only her husband but his brother also might presently appear ; but this dream of good tidings she dared not whisper to Erotion.

Meanwhile, at the entrance of Hilarion's cavern, under a sky of autumn stars, sat Pan and discoursed with the twins.

He had come to them at his appointed hour and disdained not the yellow figs which Arcadius himself brought, with a flask of most exquisite wine.

Both brothers were nervous, especially the recluse, but Pan set them at their ease and appeared to be in a humorous mood.

" Who is this swarthy and sinister person I have met with in picture-books illustrating the new faith ? " he inquired. " Artist monks paint him in their illuminated missals, and he is always either causing annoyance, or suffering the gravest indignities. I ask, because he is a very colourable imitation of myself with his horns and hooves ; but he has an unkind face,

usually carries a trident, suggestive of Neptune, and flourishes a much longer tail than mine."

"You refer to our personification of the Evil One, the Prince of Darkness, Satan," replied Hilarion uneasily.

"I have heard of him," replied Pan, "and much regret the Enemy of Mankind resembles one who would fain be humanity's friend. However, artists are only answerable to their own ideals; we have to do with graver things, and indeed your faith is a very grave matter. Many scions are being grafted upon the original stock, and I hear that while your bishops and shepherds clatter their crosiers and crooks on one another's heads, the sheep are a good deal alarmed. For errors of faith are already so easy, and so fatal, among you servants of the Galilean. Now you fight like demons to decide whether the Son was created out of nothing; now you belabour each other upon the question whether the trinity consists of Three Persons or Three Hypostases; and despite the gravity of these questions, you

approach them in such a pugnacious and ferocious mood that wisdom flies your contests and the people stand trembling and waiting to know where safety and salvation lie. Sect and sect plot and counterplot, quibble and scratch each other's eyes out—ostensibly for dogma, in reality for power—ever more power over the souls and bodies of the nations. And seeing these things, Hilarion here, and countless other men of peace, turn their backs on life and light and love, to seek living tombs as fit antechambers of the grave they welcome. It is interesting to observe that men will die for a sentiment, not for an opinion. Dogma is going to slay its thousands ; but metaphysics has no martyrs. There is, indeed, none who looks sharplier after his own skin than a metaphysician, though, of course, he will tell you that he hasn't really got a skin.

" Now, twin brother of my Arcadius, state your case and I shall declare what I think about it. Do not expect advice ; but my frank opinion is yours."

" Thus it stands with me, god Pan," replied

the young man firmly. "On the one side I am faced with the experience of human love. I turned my back upon it as you say; but it would not turn its back on me; and now my nature craves before all things for union with Erotion, of the House of Severus, a Christian maiden—one of my own converts in fact. Against this mighty experience my Faith cries trumpet-tongued, that the end of the world fast approaches—how fast no man can tell. It may be a year or two; it may be to-morrow; but our Scriptures tell us, and our Divine Master himself has stated, that the time is near. Seeing, therefore, that the end of the world and the judgment of the human race cannot be long delayed, have I the right to proceed as though this fiery ordeal were a thing of the remote future? Ought not I and Erotion and all men and women, rather than trifle with the joys of life in this world, to be flying from the wrath to come and concerning ourselves with the next world alone? That is the question to which I can find no answer, for my soul speaks with two voices and I stand

between them deprived of the power of decision."

"On his own showing," added Arcadius, "my brother is not fit to judge. Thus it is with all who think as he does: they deprive themselves of the power of judgment; they scorn the social health of the community, flout the ordinary processes of nature, condemn all happiness, and so render themselves utterly unable to pronounce an opinion on the simplest problems of human policy. One world at a time is a very sane motto, whatever may be our opinions concerning another, and now Nemesis has descended upon Hilarion and he stands caught, as it were, in the net he has so ignorantly spun for his own feet."

"This is no new thing," replied the God. "Your Pagan teachers of old were quite as strict, and quite as often confounded right and wrong, becoming confused between the errors of the flesh and its lawful, natural pleasures. Plato will be found to talk much as your Saint Paul, and Marcus Aurelius was also something of a Christian before Christ. Epicurus, on

the other hand, preserved a golden mean, founding his philosophy upon reason alone. Moderate and restrained pleasure helps to make the world go round smoothly, my friends, and to turn away from it is an act of pure superstition. Happiness, as I have often told Arcadius, is an universal desire and ideal, not put into your hearts for nothing. Far more depends upon it than you have yet grasped; and to decry happiness, as you affect to do, is to oppose natural instinct and waste time in a blind alley, since this particular instinct makes for good. Whereto, think you, your craving for misery will lead? Man is but man, and by lowering his vitality, denying himself the friendship of nature and declining her manifold devices for making this life worth while, he speedily renders it not worth while."

"That it cannot be worth while is our conviction," replied Hilarion.

"Nevertheless you have found for yourself that it may be of exceeding worth. And what follows your theories put into practice? You all become short-tempered, overwrought, un-

strung, acerb, uncharitable and harsh. Your Christians are going to make a world of porcupines, spit-fires and tyrants—a world where man will find that his security is gone, his soul no longer his own, himself a slave without liberty of thought, or freedom of conscience. And this because what your Saviour intended should be a guide to compassion and ruth, is already wrested from the spirit of the Man-God and will presently become such a stone in humanity's pathway that generations must fall bruised and bleeding before it shall be rolled from the road."

"But the end of the world," murmured Hilarion.

"Upon that subject you are misinformed," replied the goat-foot god genially. "There is no immediate fear of any conclusion. The world is destined to continue for a very long time, and it will outlast not only your life, but the lives of many millions of mankind yet to be born. The world is, in fact, still young, as worlds go. It can even count upon a future when religions, that drift from East to West

and pass after each other as the clouds pass before the wind, will finally thin away, giving place to the naked and ardent sunshine. From Olympus to Golgotha and onward to the Mount of Reason—these are but steps in the progress of human consciousness. The eternal truths remain forever few. A little child can count them. They have already echoed vainly upon human ears, and will still sound but faint and far off for many an age. It is by being selfish and patriotic that mankind gives evil its tremendous power. Between the Scylla and Charybdis of Creed and Greed his labouring bark still tosses and will toss while innumerable hosts go down to Dis. The end, however, is safe—within no god's bosom—but at the heart of unborn men and women."

They did not reply and Pan proceeded.

"And now, Arcadius, I will tell you of that one unclouded happiness which breeds no worm and brings no shadow. It is the happiness born solely on account of another; the happiness planned and wrought for humanity; the happiness begot of the outlook that elimin-

ates self; the happiness of a Socrates or a Jesus. Men, not man, have often risen to this noble height; but never a community, never a nation. Go into the world, you twain; leave your villa and your cave and do what you may to comfort the uncomforted and bring a smile upon the faces of those who never smile. You can accomplish very little; but that is not your affair. Within your own gift at least lies the power to bring the highest happiness to yourselves that man may know. You stand as yet virgin of experience. You have both good qualities, which you are wasting; for Arcadius, with his slaves and lands and pelf, is just as useless as Hilarion, with his sandals and skull."

"He has buried the skull, Mighty One," said the disciple of Pan.

"Good," answered the god. "It belonged to an Egyptian who prayed to the mummy of a cat, loved his fellow-creatures and did many kind little things, before they killed him for another's error. . . . So thus it stands, my lads. If you would be happy, do good to those

you will never see; help those you will never know; serve those who will never thank you; use your gifts of wealth, eloquence, sympathy for the benefit of all men. Do not stand and look on and shake your head from your front doorstep, Arcadius; no longer whine about your soul in this over-furnished cavern, Hilarion; but forget yourselves and throw your hearts and gifts and energies into the business of making the city of Rome a happier place than you know it to be. Arcadius can help the sick and suffering and do his little part to staunch the wounds and lessen the indignities of the poor and needy; Hilarion can speak burning words of faith and cheer and hope. He can follow his Master very effectively; and if his road leads to his Master's cross, which is probable, what better place?

"You are greatly blessed, moreover, in your women. Ceres will prove a noble right hand for Arcadius; and her cousin may be entrusted to advance the ideals of Hilarion."

"Can you hesitate, brother?" asked Arcadius. "If that which you would do shall be

better done beside Erotion, can you hesitate ? "

" Should the end of the world indeed be delayed——" began Hilarion, and stopped.

Pan regarded him with a smile.

" Are there any Eleusinian mysteries in your faith ? " he asked.

" Most certainly not," replied Hilarion, " nothing of the kind."

" I heard a rumour of Love Feasts," replied Pan gently, " but I daresay it was only a Pagan rumour. You have adopted so many charming details from the old faith ; and, in any case, where is the prosperous religion that has no part or lot with sex ? "

" I have always told my brother that he went into this business too young," declared Arcadius.

" But sex is the one thing we abhor," answered Hilarion firmly.

" How different from your grandfathers," replied Pan. " Now they glorified sex and honoured it with many a significant and healthy ceremonial. They went a trifle too far some-

times—who does not? But you are lost in the opposite direction. You ignore sex, insult it, deny it, do everything but escape it. That, being men and women first, Christians afterwards, you cannot do. And what results? The fair and sweet becomes foul and bitter. You assault a vital part of yourselves, and outraged Nature hits back with hideous blows. In the interests of spiritual development you would crush the sources of your being, with the result that sex loses its rhythm and too often becomes your sole, horrid preoccupation and possession. Asceticism, my good Hilarion, is merely sensualism spelled backward, and a man may as well seek to fly from his feet and hands as from the foundations of his physical existence. You dam the healthy human impulses, and they run over into your souls, stagnate and breed a pestilence. Healthful energies, designed that man may endure and rise to his remote destiny, are converted to soul-destroying demons by your folly; therefore drop this nasty nonsense; be a man, my friend, and face manhood. To fly from it is

the highest cowardice, the greatest danger; for trust me, the soul that has honoured its body on earth will sooner win the nod of your good Peter at the Gate than that mistaken spirit who has dragged unclean thoughts, unclean dreams and unclean bones through a lonely desert. Quit this attitude of exaggerated respect for your own soul, Hilarion, and devote your span to the souls of other people, that your own may become worthy of respect. A soul should not rust out, but wear out on the business of other souls. Therefore take to heaven a soul polished by well-doing, not one mouldy with storage. Fight and die clean and game—both of you."

"And marry Erotion first?" asked Hilarion humbly.

"Yes," replied Pan. "Most emphatically marry Erotion first. There is nothing in your religion to forbid you from being a decent member of society, or from assuming the dignity, happiness and responsibility of a normal man. Feed up and take exercise and get well again. Then be married and go into

the world—hearty, healthy, sane—to win your experience, enlarge your sympathy and do with your might what you will find within your reach to be done. And don't break your shins on forms and ceremonies. Progress in morality never depended on religions and never can. Somebody has said, or will, that the religion of one age is the literary entertainment of the next; but the righteousness of an age is the true light for those that follow; and as righteousness waxes and wanes from century to century, so may mankind hope or fear, setting his course for the good and avoiding the evil.

"Bless you both, and may whatsoever gods there be smile upon your endeavours."

He rose, and while Arcadius knelt and kissed his stalwart hoof according to custom, Hilarion bowed respectfully. Even as he did so he felt a doubt that bolts from his own affronted deity might strike him. But nothing happened. As Arcadius had assured him on a previous occasion, truth cannot contradict truth; and was it not written three hundred years before

Christ, that "Communion and friendship, temperance and justice bind together heaven and earth and gods and men?"

Yet Arcadius felt conscious of a change in Pan, and before the deity stumped off upon his night-hidden way, he spoke to him.

"How is it with you yourself, dear God?" he asked. "It has ever been the selfish mortal's custom to fling his troubles upon an immortal director and load the divine shoulders with burdens often of his own making; yet I do not stint my love, and love, being quick-sighted, perceives a change."

"It is with me as with all of us in whom mankind puts trust and faith," replied the god. "The measure of a deity's success must ever depend upon the quality of his worshippers. The breath of our celebrants and votaries is the life in our nostrils; and as that diminishes, so must we abate. Godkind are in truth solely dependent on mankind, as light is nothing without darkness, heat nothing without cold, stability no more than a word without vicissitude and change. To-day new divine figures

are at the meridian of man's worship ; a new evangel draws the heart and hope of humanity ; a new dynasty of Heaven is to be exalted to the central throne ; but the simple theology of your Christian primitives will be soon overlaid, corrupted, lost in the usual flood of myth and metaphysic. Meantime we constellations of Olympus sink to our setting under the dawn of your Triple Sun. We pass to the limbo of vanished pantheons and mythologies ; we join the gods of Assyria and Persia and Egypt in their everlasting eclipse ; we diminish and melt away as the snow upon Soracte, while human hope and fear, trust and affection depart from us. Some will vanish out of the heart of man for ever ; while others may loiter as loved ghosts for all time. Of such am I, and my syrinx shall yet whisper by the river, my lonely altars win their worship down many an avenue of human years. For herds must roam upon the high lands, flocks silver the water meadows ; and man, thinking on the mettle of his pastures, still spare a kindly thought for the Pasturer."

He was gone, and though Hilarion suggested waiting until morn, Arcadius would not have it so, but made his brother descend straightway to Ceres and Erotion.

They found the women on their knees, lifted them up and filled their hearts with joy ; but after Ceres and Arcadius had stolen from them, the lovers could do no more than clasp hands and gaze upon each other's faces in silent and speechless bliss. Thus, indeed, did Aurora, goddess of dawn, find them, as she ascended out of the East, to pay her tribute of dewy tears at Memnon's grave ; and she woke roses in the pale cheeks of Hilarion and his lass, and flashed into their adoring eyes the light of the morning star and the rapture of the morning wind.

## XIV

## *THEY GIRD THEMSELVES*

THEODOSIUS, last of those mighty Romans who shook the world—last of stature to stand beside Julius and Augustus — granted audience and attended to affairs. Having dealt faithfully with the rascals responsible for the destruction of young Gratian and the second Valentinian, for a moment he breathed himself in Rome.

Then there came to him a wise and saintly bishop with a tale of woe; and Theodosius harkened to this good prelate and considered the matter of the twins, Arcadius and Hilarion.

" I hear," said the Emperor, " that they are mighty busy in well-doing. Themselves and their wives seek to benefit the capital and support those precious edicts of the first

Valentinian touching our physicians and our education. They are an enlightened pair and clearly on the side of the angels. Arcadius is generous with his wealth, nor does he commit his benefactions to lesser men, but strives valiantly in person to reach the roots of evil, and being a shrewd and honest person, does far more good than harm. Of how many can we say as much? I have myself listened to his purposes from his own lips and find no little to applaud. He is, in truth, a worthy man and does worthy things. As for Hilarion, he possesses the gift of golden speech, utters comfortable words and draws the sad and suffering to our God. Would there were more such single-hearted Christians in the priesthood."

"All that you say is true, Majesty," admitted the anxious bishop, "and concerning Hilarion, though once a solitary, dedicated to the life of aloofness and contemplation, I confess that by entering the ranks of men he has served both humanity and religion. But

Arcadius is another matter. Granted that he does much obvious good and spends his wealth to excellent purpose; granted that he works in the Lord's vineyard with a will, rises early and late takes rest; yet is all held to be dust and ashes, since nothing but evil can ultimately reward his efforts. In a word, he refuses to be baptised. He is pure Pagan at heart and does not blush to own and keep in good repair a temple to Pan. Thither he is known to withdraw himself from time to time and commune with this false divinity.

"And what would your eminence propose to do about it?" inquired Theodosius.

"The hierarchy is of opinion that he should be destroyed," replied the bishop regretfully. "A majority, of which I am not one, submits that Arcadius be publicly burned alive for an example."

"I think not, my friend. Arcadius shall never perish while the Emperor can prevent it. Let us, bishop, ask ourselves what the Master would say and do. He has told us that those

who are not against Him are with Him. The life of a good man, remember, is always too short. He must soon be gone and the work that he has done be forgotten. Meanwhile let us regard Arcadius as a picturesque and harmless survival of a happier age than ours."

"I rejoice in your wisdom, Majesty. But this is the vexed question : May righteous things be done in the name of Pan ? "

"Righteousness is still righteousness and cannot be otherwise, bishop, whatever the source or inspiration," replied Theodosius. "There you will, no doubt, find yourself in opposition to many devout and earnest leaders of the Faith ; yet reason cannot deny it. Therefore let Arcadius be and suffer him to proceed about his business. Stone not the prophets, priest."

Strengthened by this royal echo of his own good heart, and now determined to support and save Arcadius, the prelate thanked his sovereign and withdrew.

" If," thought he, " the world had remembered that the days of good men are always too short, then many masters of salvation had not been driven from life before their time was ended, or their precious gifts received."

THE END

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